

*Fahrenheit 9/11: A Case Study in Counternarrative*

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Submitted to the graduate program in Communication Studies and to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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## Acknowledgements

My sincere appreciation is extended to the University of Kansas Department Of Communication Studies for giving me an opportunity. In particular, I am indebted to Dr. Beth Manolescu for her patience and careful supervision. She taught me how to be a better writer and forced me to meet her expectations. For this I will be forever grateful. I would also like to thank Dr. Scott Harris and Dr. Dorothy Pennington. They have both been very influential in my development as a coach, teacher, and scholar. Dr. Harris' work ethic has been an inspiration to me and Dr. Pennington has been an enduring role model for a young African American academic. The value of smart, caring, and inspiring faculty can never be over estimated.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to my family and friends they have all been an inspiration to me; especially my daughter Samantha. In addition, Steve and Marianne Smith a kid could never ask for a better set of surrogate parents.

I have been blessed to have the love and support of Sarah Topp. She has been my best friend and confidante throughout this entire experience. She is the best thing that has ever happened to me, I hope she understands that.

Finally, I would like to thank my grandmother Rosetta Barksdale, my mom Laura Foy and my sister Ethel Thomas. May you all rest in peace and I love you.

## Abstract

This thesis does a rhetorical analysis of Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* to understand its failure to achieve its goal of a George W. Bush defeat in the 2004 election. To do this I outline a theory of counternarrative which relies on argument theory to understand the resolution of competing narratives. I begin by creating a nuanced theory of counternarrative which relies on informal logic and Ralph Johnson's dialectical tier. Then I look at the construction of Bush's official narrative from his public speeches beginning on September 20, 2001 through the invasion of Iraq. After detailing Bush's narrative I analyze the moments of argumentative clash between it and *Fahrenheit 9/11*. I conclude that the failure of Moore's counternarrative was inevitable due to its poor argument construction and omission of the dialectical tier.

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## Chapter One: An Introduction to the Rhetoric of *Fahrenheit 9/11*

In the aftermath of September 11, President Bush accomplished three important tasks: he comforted the citizens of the U.S., provided a frame to understand the events of 9/11 and pursued his agenda without opposition. Murphy (2003) explains “Bush felt the need to define the meaning of 9/11 and we felt the need to understand this horrific event....Bush crafted our interpretation of this attack....Framing the attacks as a biblical test of a chosen people made them comprehensible” (pp.610-11). If Americans are the chosen people then whoever attacked had to be evil. By framing the attacks as a test of American moral character, Bush was able to define the world in terms of the moral against the immoral. Bush’s Manichean view of the world is exemplified by the statement “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” (Bush, 2001, ¶ 30). Because Bush was able to comfort and explain the tragedy of 9/11 to the American public, they rewarded him with some of the highest approval ratings ever recorded for a President (Murphy, 2003). In this rhetorical environment, deliberation and dissent were actively discouraged. The lack of deliberation was evident in the near unanimous vote to invade Afghanistan. From Afghanistan to the invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration controlled the rhetorical landscape. While there were mass demonstrations against the war in Iraq the media was complicit in Bush’s aggressive unilateral policy, until 2004. During the election summer of 2004, Michael Moore and LIONSGATE films released the documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11*. *Fahrenheit* did something no other movie has ever done in an election cycle: it attempted to unseat an elected president. On the one hand,

*Fahrenheit* has been described as an “angry satirical broadside against the Bush administration” (Editors, 2004, p. 1) while on the other some call it “his best movie—funny, heart breaking, outraged, and outrageous” (Pollitt, 2004, p. 12). Finding meaning and making sense of conflicting stories about the world can be difficult, but not impossible. In this thesis, I will examine *Fahrenheit 9/11* as a counternarrative to the Bush administrations’ narrative and seek to explain why it did not work. By using Moore’s *Fahrenheit* as my case study, I will establish guidelines for what is a counternarrative while using narrative fidelity, probability, and rational argument testing to explore the force of counternarrative. Lastly, I will analyze the criteria for evaluating the narrative and counternarrative dialectic.

### Literature Review

While there has been a lot written about *Fahrenheit 9/11* there have been no rhetorical critiques of the film. Literature written on the movie can be broken up into two basic categories: popular and scholarly. The popular literature ranges from the *New York Times* to the *National Enquirer* but scholarly literature is limited due the movie’s recency.

### *Popular Literature*

*Fahrenheit 9/11* is polysemic. However, for this thesis I am not interested in the positive reviews of the movie. It is my goal to understand why the movie failed to achieve the director’s goal of creating a grassroots movement which would oust President Bush from office in the 2004 election. For this reason I want to assess the

negative reviews of the movie. So I chose reviews from Michael Isikoff from *Newsweek*, and a Christopher Hitchens article from *Slate.com*. I chose *Newsweek* because it is one of the most read periodicals in America. From *Slate.com* I chose Christopher Hitchens (2004a) article “Unfahrenheit 9/11: The lies of Michael Moore” because it is a representative critique of *Fahrenheit*.

*Newsweek* has a circulation of “more than 4 million and a total readership of more than 21 million” (“History of Newsweek” 2005). Christopher Hitchens’, one of the most outspoken critics of *Fahrenheit*, wrote one of the most quoted articles against Moore’s character and his movie. Each publication is unique in its approach to *Fahrenheit 9/11* but together they form a representative critique of Moore’s documentary by the mainstream media. Although this list is not exhaustive it will index the reception of Moore’s movie.

#### *Academic Literature*

G. Thomas Goodnight (2005) has written the only analysis of *Fahrenheit* done by a rhetorician that I could find at the time of this writing. Even though it is not a rhetorical analysis, Goodnight (2005) examines how celebrities advocate their values through their work using *The Passion of the Christ* and *Fahrenheit 9/11* as case studies. Goodnight (2005) explains that the focal point of his argument is the public sphere and deliberative democracy: “The aim of the article is to discover how the constraining conventions of television and the practices of film in 2004 collaborated at election time in the peaceful transfer of power so that we may begin to speak more



freely about democratic politics in a time of war” (p. 410). Goodnight (2005) never addresses the use of narrative or counternarrative. Moreover, he almost exclusively focuses on ethos as the main component to persuasion. My case study will differ in its focus and its examination of persuasive strategies. Holbert & Hansen (2006) examine the effects of *Fahrenheit 9/11* on political priming, party affiliation, and candidate choice. Holbert and Hansen provide some insight into how the audience reacted to certain parts of the film; however, it is a quantitative approach to Moore’s message, and does not seek to understand why Moore’s movie failed to create a groundswell against Bush. Rhoads (2004), a psychologist, analyzes the question of Michael Moore’s effect on the election. Rhoads’ analysis is about the backlash that Moore may have created with his movie:

Did Michael Moore actually help George W. Bush win another four years as president? Cokie Roberts gave public voice to what had been whispered on the internet since the election: ‘I think that Michael Moore had a very major impact—a negative impact—on the Democratic Party’ she said. ‘I think he exemplified all of the things that people hate about Democrats.’ (Rhoads, 2004, p. 1)

The main line of thought, which frames Rhoad’s article, is analyzing the backlash against Moore. Most of the article cites historical examples of persuasive backlash and compares those to this past presidential election and *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Along this same trajectory is a recent article written by Koopman et al. (2006) which investigates

the immediate effects of viewing *Fahrenheit* by surveying respondents at four California theaters instantly after the movie. The Koopman et al article can be used to identify parts of the movie that people found persuasive. Neither this article nor the Rhodes article evaluates *Fahrenheit 9/11* from a rhetorical perspective nor do they attempt to chart the persuasive strategies of the film.

There is also an entire issue of *Film &History* (2005) dedicated to *Fahrenheit 9/11*. In one article, Toplin (2005) outlines the battle over the production of *Fahrenheit*. He also explains that the battle over *Fahrenheit* in the media is political and not aesthetic. One of the few articles that deal with the message is an article by Nolley (2005). Nolley runs a listserv called H-Film, on which he asked for readers to respond about the film. He found that many of the conservative arguments against the film were really against the filmmaker. This is important because most of the literature against *Fahrenheit* claims that Moore lied outright and tried to smear the president. Nolley (2005) answers this claim by stating that Moore enjoyed a certain amount of directorial freedom. In the end none of these articles even attempts a rhetorical analysis.

Finally, Toplin's (2006) book is about the historical context and implications of the movie. Toplin (2006) begins his analysis with Moore's outburst at the Oscars and tracks the historical arc from that point until the election. By the end of his book, Toplin hypothesizes about the implications of Moore's film on future documentary. While this book is a helpful resource it does not examine the rhetorical implications

of *Fahrenheit*. My thesis and Toplin's book will complement each other by analyzing the implications of *Fahrenheit* to rhetorical and film scholars.

### Counternarrative

Fisher (1984) tells us "that man is in his actions and practice, as well as his fictions, essentially a story telling animal" (p. 1). Recognition of humanity's storytelling disposition can help us understand the form and social function of narratives. Narratives have a significant impact on shaping our understanding of the political process (Bennett & Edelman, 1985; Bormann, 1985; Fisher, 1984, 1985, 1987; Rowland, 1988; Warnick, 1987). "Stories are among the most universal means of representing human events. In addition to suggesting an interpretation for a social happening, a well crafted narrative can motivate the belief and action of outsiders toward the actors and events caught up in its plot" (Bennett & Edelman, 1985, p. 156). Often we find ourselves in a situation that traditional rationality can not explain (Fisher, 1985). Even though many authors feel that rationality and argument are equally valid methods of unpacking rhetoric and film (Rowland, 1988, 1989; Warnick 1987) there are just some arguments that are valid but unpersuasive and vice versa; the narrative paradigm helps us understand why and how these phenomenon happen. Narratives make arguments, and we can judge the quality of those arguments by applying rational argument testing and the dialectical tier (Govier, 2005; Johnson, 2000; Rowland, 1988). While the narrative paradigm is useful we can build upon this

concept by establishing how the narrative dialectic functions to privilege certain narratives by including the concept of the counternarrative.

Lankshear and Peters (1996) have expanded the idea of the narrative to include counternarrative. They begin their analysis of the counternarrative from the philosophical perspective of postmodernism and outline two basic functions of the counternarrative which are “to counter metanarratives” and “to counter official narratives” (p. 2-3). Drawing heavily on the work of Lyotard (1984) they eschew the existence of metanarratives. They point to the “endless proliferation of subcultures and groups” (p. 3) each with its own story as evidence that metanarratives no longer exist. It is their contention, as well as Lyotard’s, that this proliferation of narratives has led to a legitimization crisis of metanarratives which bind a culture together and serve as the foundation of knowledge production (Lankshear & Peters, 1996; Lyotard, 1984). “‘The Postmodern Condition’ is, above all, a critique of the Enlightenment metanarratives which by virtue of their alleged totality, universality, and absolutist status are rendered ahistorical, as if their formation took place outside of history and of social practice. Lyotard questions the dogmatic basis of these metanarratives, and exposes their ‘terroristic’ and violent nature, by which they assert certain ‘Truths’ from the perspective of one discourse by silencing or excluding another” (Lankshear & Peters, 1996, p. 9). While drawing on postmodernism Lankshear & Peters (1996) want to stress their “incredulity” to official narratives but do little in the way of helping us understand how an official narrative or counternarrative works. Even if their analysis of the historical and cultural climate is

correct, we still need to understand the place of symbol use in counternarrative formation and circulation. It is in this niche that this essay will be useful. It is my contention that we can use narrative and rational argument testing to explain how and when audiences will be moved to dissent or acquiesce to counternarratives. If we believe that man is essentially a storytelling animal (Fisher, 1984) then the need to understand how one narrative becomes privileged over another is a fundamental epistemological question.

My thesis will examine the way in which counternarratives emerge as direct responses to official narratives. The counternarrative is a direct rejoinder to a narrative argument. Since it is widely understood that narratives argue (Bennett & Edelman, 1985; Bormann, 1985; Fisher, 1984, 1985, 1986; McGee & Nelson, 1985; Rowland, 1988; Warnick, 1987) it seems reasonable to believe that narratives would materialize as responses to arguments. By applying the dialectical tier and rational argument testing to *Fahrenheit*, I hope to understand how its narrative structure and persuasive strategies work throughout the text. Additionally, I hope to use mainstream criticisms of the movie to show the structure of this narrative dialectic and to explain the emergence of counternarratives in the political realm. This study will provide some insight on why some narratives persuade and others fade away.

#### Justification of Text

Burke (1967) wrote that literature is fundamentally equipment for living. In doing so he wanted to call attention to our usage of literature as a strategy or attitude

that informs our understanding of the world. Young (1997, 2000) and Brummett (1984, 1985) have stretched this concept to include television and film by arguing, “Stories do not merely pose problems, they suggest ways and means to resolve the problems insofar as they follow discursively a pattern that people might follow in reality” (Brummett, 1984, p. 164). In the electronic age the media plays a central role in public deliberation and formation of public opinion (Delicath and Deluca, 2003; Brummett, 1984, 1985; Murphy, 2003; Young, 1997, 2000). The power of films and specifically documentary to shape the public’s perception of politics has been well documented since Leni Riefenstahl’s documentary exalting Hitler’s Nazi Germany, *Triumph of Will*. Lynn Higgins (2005) explains that in the post 9/11 world our attachment to the image becomes an attachment to constructed reality: “In the post-9/11 historical moment, it seems to me that the stakes have been raised, reality has become ever more inaccessible, and the widespread hunger for images reflecting reliable information is correspondingly acute” (p. 27). These constructed meanings of past events can have a profound effect on how we predict and act upon the future. When audiences watch documentaries, they are participating in the reinterpretation and retelling of history. This can be a devastating problem when there are fewer rules of objective content and journalistic integrity.

In the postmodern cultural moment an in-depth analysis of how counternarratives function can be a helpful methodological tool for understanding our cultural values and beliefs. I argue that *Fahrenheit 9/11* and its responses are an appropriate space to develop a more nuanced theory of counternarratives. There are

three reasons for choosing to analyze this counternarrative over others. First, analyzing *Fahrenheit* will allow us to merge some of the elements of the postmodern counternarrative and traditional rhetorical analysis by focusing on a contained narrative dialectic. Because it is a singular narrative argument attempting to persuade audiences on a particular issue it is easier to track how this counternarrative circulates. By examining both the counternarrative and its responses, we can build a theory of the counternarrative dialectic and explain how one narrative can hold sway over another. Second, *Fahrenheit 9/11* was perhaps the most controversial moment of dissent against the Bush administration since the bombing of the World Trade Center, and since this is an essay about narratives which run in opposition to official narratives, *Fahrenheit* seems to lend itself to my analysis. Finally, it is important from a pedagogical standpoint to understand the influence that the entertainment industry has on shaping our cultural frames. Grossberg (1993) reminds us of three important points: first we must understand that reality is made through human action; second the popular is the terrain on which people live and where political struggles are carried out; and third we must place particular practices into particular contexts. By doing these things we can analyze how cultural artifacts such as film, documentaries, books, and television can affect our lives and shape our frames of acceptance.

Movies often have political messages and documentaries even more so but they all follow the narrative form. The past few years have seen a resurgence of the documentary, and these documentaries are more political than those of the past

(Higgins, 2004). Documentaries have a main character, a setting, and even a plot. *Fahrenheit* is no different. Michael Moore places himself and his politics at the center of his film as the protagonist and the Bush administration as the antagonist. Moore becomes the everyman attacking the corporate structure and politics of the Bush administration. The setting is more ephemeral than the characters but the landscape of American politics is where this drama unfolds. Lastly, the plot is one where the protagonist tries to rally support for the overthrow of the despot King. One unique feature of documentaries is the impact of the narrator. In *Fahrenheit* the narrator, Michael Moore, plays a powerful role by creating the fabric of the story, deciding what is talked about and what is not. This is amplified by the fact that he is also the director. Moore uses his place as the narrator to appear omniscient while at the same time manipulating the visual evidence to prove his case.

*Fahrenheit* meets the standards for a political narrative. The release of Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* has provided great numbers of people in the U.S. the opportunity to demonstrate their opposition to the war in Iraq, the policies of the Bush administration, and their general disgust with the political and media establishment. More than three million people viewed the film in its first weekend in the theaters, by all accounts overwhelmingly approving its message (Walsh, 2004, n.p.). On June 28, a couple of days after *Fahrenheit 9/11*'s premiere, Moore spoke to thousands of people via an Internet hookup at a national town meeting organized by MoveOn.org:



‘It was the number-one movie in every single red state in America,’ Moore said, as cheers went up in the room in which I was watching with about 200 MoveOn supporters. ‘Every single state that Bush won in 2000, it was the number-one film in it.’ The news seemed ominous for the president; a real sense of excitement and hope filled the room. ‘I’m sure when the White House read that this morning, that was one of their worst nightmares come true,’ Moore said. (York, 2005, p. 48)

For liberal America the assault on the Bush-Cheney administration was welcomed by the most powerful Democrats; “*Fahrenheit 9/11* opened in Washington with an audience that included Democratic National Chairman Terry McAuliffe, Sens. Tom Daschle, Barbara Boxer, and Tom Harkin, Congressmen Henry Waxman, Charles Rangel, and Jim McDermott (who before the war said that he believed Saddam Hussein more than George W. Bush), and the 9/11 commission's most partisan member, Richard Ben-Veniste (Barone, 2004, p. 41). Washington DC is not the only place that democrats came to supported the launch Barone (2004) continues, “The film received a standing ovation. In Manhattan, Democratic National Committee Treasurer Maureen White hosted a showing of the film for local big contributors. Seldom have leaders of a political party promoted a commercial film so shamelessly” (Barone, 2004, p. 41). These were not the only people to see this movie. Millions paid to see this movie on opening weekend, causing it to gross more over that weekend than any other movie; “To date *Fahrenheit 9/11* is the highest-grossing documentary of all time, with box office receipts in excess of \$100 million in the US

alone, surpassing the success of Moore's previous film *Bowling for Columbine*” (Barone, 2004). Moreover, *Fahrenheit 9/11* won the best film award at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival, the Palme d'Or, and he received “the longest standing ovation in the history of the festival” (Wilshire, 2005, p.129).

The controversy created by *Fahrenheit 9/11* cannot be underestimated. Porton (2004) explains, “since the American release of *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Michael Moore has been hailed by the left as the new Tom Paine, denounced by his right wing opponents as the incarnation of Joseph Goebbels and Leni Riefenstahl, and compared by film critics to such disparate figures as Sergei Eisenstein and Kenneth Anger. Moore has become a lightning rod for hyperbolic praise and disgust” (p. 3). Talking heads across the nation took time out of their day to praise or blast Moore. Rush Limbaugh, Bill O'Reilly, and the entire Fox network immediately went on the offensive, comparing Moore's movie to Nazi propaganda and stating that people who went to see it were “Nazi cheerleaders” (Follman, 2004). “The news about Moore and *Fahrenheit 9/11* has ‘legs’ as they say in the news business, because his movie provoked widespread debate throughout the presidential election campaign, and the films [sic] images of the President and the war in Iraq remain convenient points of reference for partisans both on the left and right” (Toplin, 2005, p. 8). Moreover, the movie takes many visual potshots at Bush and his administration. From showing Wolfowitz licking his comb, to Bush vacationing, to Ashcroft singing “Let the Eagle Soar” Moore depicts the Bush administration as one built on folly and delusional

nationalism. The controversy surrounding the movie made it a huge event before it even opened.

Moore's project rests on the idea that entertainment is the most effective realm for political criticism (Mattson, 2004). After 9/11, the American political landscape was controlled almost exclusively by the conservative agenda (Murphy, 2003). The war in Afghanistan, tax cuts, increased defense spending, and rolling back environmental and civil protections were all part of Bush's agenda which went unchallenged in the wake of 9/11. It seemed as if there was nothing that could stop the machine. Democrats, too afraid of political repercussions, gave in to Bush's every whim. The American political landscape had not been this one-sided in years and too often the mainstream media in this country—the press, television, and radio—neglected their duties of asking hard questions and dealing with larger issues (Editors, 2004). So even if Moore's movie was not the first act of dissent against the Bush administration following 9/11 it may have been the most sensational. Understanding the political environment in which this movie arose is critical for understanding the purpose of its counternarrative.

### Context of *Fahrenheit 9/11*

A brief sketch of Michael Moore and his movie *Fahrenheit 9/11* will be provided in this section. I plan to briefly cover three things: the motivation of the Michael Moore, the motivation for *Fahrenheit 9/11*, and the political context. These

three elements will allow us to comprehend the political landscape in which *Fahrenheit* emerges.

### *The Motivation of Michael Moore*

Michael Moore's movie career has been wrought with controversy, from his debut movie *Roger & Me* to *Bowling for Columbine* and now *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Moore attributes a lot of his motivation to his working class background (Corliss, 2004). Moore went to a catholic school, was an eagle scout, and was the son and nephew of General Motors autoworkers. Watching Flint, Michigan crumble under the factory closings of G.M. prompted Moore to shoot his first movie *Roger & Me*. *Roger & Me* followed Moore seeking an interview with G.M. C.E.O. Roger Smith. Moore wanted to question him about the social and economic impact of factory closings in Flint. *Roger & Me*, although only making \$250,000, put Moore on the map as the premier populist agitator. He even admits that he never had any success until he was 35 years old. In fact, he claims that, "up until that point I never made more than \$15,000 a year. When you spend that first 17 years—in other words—half your life earning \$15,000 or less it really doesn't matter what kind of success you have after that. It's so ingrained in you" (Corliss, 2004, p. 69). Moore has been involved in the political process since he was a teenager. When he was 18, he ran for the Davison County school board, because he disagreed with a policy at the high school, and won, making him one of the youngest elected officials in U.S. history (Strauss, 2004). Since the day Moore dropped out of the University of Michigan at

Flint he has been involved in politics. He was the publisher of the *Flint Voice*, editor at *Mother Jones*, and even had a political show called *TV Nation*. It could be said that Moore marches to the beat of his own drummer but this is the reason he has been able to speak truth to power in his own way and, “‘you don't go to a gunfight with a slingshot.’ Moore shoots only with a camera, but it's loaded” (Corliss, 2004, p. 69).

### *The Motivation for Fahrenheit 9/11*

Michael Moore wanted Americans to vote Bush out of office. Traditionally, dissent had little to do with political affiliation. Often it had to do with a charismatic leader able to propose strong ideals and feasible programs of action (Nuzzo, 2005). Moore seems to fulfill both of these requirements; he lacks political affiliation (he attacks the Democratic Party as often as he does Republicans) and he is charismatic. Moore is not your traditional charismatic leader but his charisma comes from his conviction to his ideals. Moore had one overarching motivation in the making of *Fahrenheit*; he wanted Bush out of office, “MoveOn.com organized... a virtual meeting with the filmmaker, who answered questions about his film and discussed his hopes that viewer outrage would turn into grass-roots political efforts to vote Bush out of office” (Editors, 2004, p.1). Attempting to remove a sitting president through unaffiliated documentary is what separates this movie from other documentaries, making it a unique political event.

*Fahrenheit* had critics before it was ever shown in a theatre. One of the film's notable critics was Michael Eisner, President of the Disney Corporation, because he

held the rights to Michael Moore and his movie. Disney owned Miramax and Miramax owned Moore. Eisner claimed that Disney did not want to be associated with the movie because Disney, and consequently Miramax, was “non-partisan” (Zengerle, 2005). However, Moore claimed that Disney “was afraid of losing its tax breaks it receives for its theme parks and hotels in Florida, where the president’s brother, Jeb Bush, is governor” (Zengerle, 2004, p. 21). Nonetheless, “Disney executives indicated that they would not budge from their position forbidding Miramax to be the distributor of the film in North America” (Rutenberg, 2004, p. A1) leaving Moore to look for a North American distributor for *Fahrenheit*, which he found at LIONSGATE Films. The *New York Times* was the first to break the story on the front page and they ran it with the headline, “Disney Is Blocking Distribution of Film That Criticizes Bush” (Rutenberg, 2004, p. A1). This headline story sparked a nationwide debate about free speech, political integrity, Michael Moore, and most importantly *Fahrenheit 9/11*. The Disney controversy fueled so much interest in the movie that when it won the Palme d’Or, the highest prize at the Cannes Film Festival, it made the national news (Zengerle, 2004) and set the ball rolling for a media spectacle.

### Political Context

Silberstein (2002) explains how the attacks of September 11 gave the administration the rhetorical force to invade Afghanistan and later Iraq. There is no doubt that September 11 was a defining moment for our nation, our president, and us

individually. The invasion of Afghanistan once again showed the overwhelming superiority of America's war fighting capability. Moreover, it set the stage for the invasion of Iraq. Using the terror attacks as a pretext the administration attempted to link Saddam Hussein to Osama Bin Laden and other terrorist organizations. Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and Rice all stated publicly that they believed Saddam had weapons of mass destruction and would be willing to give these weapons to terrorists to use against the U.S. Therefore, in the fall of 2002 President Bush began preparing the invasion of Iraq and on March 20th, 2003 the "coalition of the willing" invaded Iraq. By April 9, television viewers were given their first good news as we watched American tanks roll into Baghdad and "liberate" the capital city of Iraq. These images were closely followed with Iraqis toppling a giant statue of Saddam (Rampton & Stauber, 2003). Since the U.S. invasion of Iraq began, America has lost over 2,000 troops and 40,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed in Iraq (White & Tyson, 2005; Iraqboudycount.org, 2006). The reality of a protracted intervention into Iraq was the hottest topic in the election of 2004. The political context in which Moore's movie is set is one of partisan politics and enmity. The 2004 election was unique in the scale and scope of media involvement in shaping public opinion from the Swift Boat Veterans to Michael Moore. It seemed like partisan groups all over the spectrum wanted to be heard.

Besides the work of Moore, an unprecedented number of documentary films were produced in the last four years (See Greenwald's *Iraq for Sale*; Jarwecki's *Why We Fight*; and PBS's *Private Warriors*). These films look back at events but also

beyond the present to give words of warning toward the future. They not only want to inform audiences but also to activate them. Vietnam was a major campaign theme in 2004. Both candidates were of the Vietnam generation and played different roles during that war. Partisan filmmakers on both sides of the presidential election made films defending, even glorifying their candidates. (Toplin, 2006, p. xx). By establishing a clear context for Moore's counternarrative, it is now possible to move to my plan of study for this thesis.

*Fahrenheit 9/11* is just the tip of the iceberg in the fight that has been waging since 9/11 to control the meaning of the tragedy. Silberstein (2002) explains, "This... is about language, about the ways language is deployed in times of a national crisis. In the aftermath of the events of September 11, through public rhetoric, an act of terror became a war; the Bush presidency was ratified...patriotism became consumerism, dissent was discouraged...Perhaps most importantly, and public language (re) created a national identity" (p. xi). It is this process of using the public sphere to create reasoned narratives and counternarratives that this paper delves into with hopes of understanding how they function.

### Plan of Study

My thesis is organized into four chapters in addition to this introductory chapter. Chapter 2 will develop a limited definition of the counternarrative and explicate guidelines for recognizing a counternarrative. Furthermore, Chapter 2 will set forth the means to evaluate the narrative dialectic between a narrative and



counternarrative. Chapter 3 will show how Bush constructed the official narrative about the meaning of 9/11. Chapter 4 will analyze *Fahrenheit 9/11* and select strategies used by Michael Moore to construct his counternarrative. Chapter 4 will also evaluate how and why Moore's counternarrative failed to dislodge the official Bush narrative. Chapter 5 will discuss the lessons drawn from analyzing the strategies used by Moore. Additionally, the theoretical and practical implications of these findings will be discussed. This chapter will close with a discussion about the possible direction of future rhetorical studies.

## Chapter 2: Method: The development of the counternarrative

Theorists have yet to tackle the problem of infusing argumentative research into a discussion of narrative. While many have stated that it is a good idea to use rational argument testing when dealing with narrative, no one has sought to explain the process of narrative dialectics. When narratives argue against other narratives they are in dialectic. Dialectic in its broadest sense means: “the process of eliciting the truth ... aimed at opening out what is already implicitly known, or at exposing the contradictions and muddles of an opponent’s position” (Blackburn, 1996, p. 104). Examining the historical, cultural, and social contexts in which narratives and counternarratives emerge is important to critically assessing the dialectic. Current conceptions of narrative do not account for the counternarrative; instead, they analyze and assess narratives as monological rhetorics. As such, they focus on their internal consistency and use of persuasive strategies and not the relationship to other narratives or external realities.

There are no theories on how to evaluate the process of a narrative dialectic. Current narrative theorists (Fisher 1984, 1987; McGee & Nelson, 1985; Rowland 1987) hold that narratives compete for audiences but not argumentatively against other narratives. For example, Fisher sets out to show how narratives gain credibility for audiences by relying on narrative fidelity and probability, but Fisher never explains what happens when two narratives compete for the same audiences or when these narratives argue with each other. This chapter fills those gaps in narrative

theory. I map out what a counternarrative is, discuss its functions, and propose how to evaluate it. Developing a theory of counternarrative will open up the possibility of making narrative argument less a monological concept than a dialogical one, and it will make the term counternarrative methodologically useful for the rhetorical scholar.

### Identifying the counternarrative

A counternarrative must have three characteristics: (a) it must be narrative, (b) it must counter an official narrative, and (c) it must function to open space for alternative narratives to be heard by creating public debate about an official narrative. Before going further, it will help to begin with a definition of counternarrative. Lankshear and Peters (1996) define counternarrative by assigning it two functions. First counternarratives are meant to question the reality of a larger metanarrative; these narratives “take issue with narratives which have come down from Enlightenment” (p. 2) as their starting point. Second counternarratives “counter not merely the grand narratives but also the ‘official’ and ‘hegemonic’ narratives...such counternarratives are as Lyotard explains little stories—the little stories of those individuals and groups whose knowledges and histories have been marginalized, excluded, subjugated, or simply forgotten in the telling of the official narratives” (p. 2). Narratives can serve multiple functions: they can explain, persuade, argue, and teach (Kvernbekk, 2002). However, the two primary functions of counternarrative are arguing against official narratives and invigorating public political debate.

Explaining, persuading, and teaching are all by-products of these initial functions. For a text to be a counternarrative it should fulfill at least one of these functions.

### *Shortcomings of Current Theories of Counternarratives*

In many cases, authors refer to a series of arguments as counternarratives even though they lack narrative structure (Funnell, 1998; Giroux, 1996; Lankshear & Peters, 1996; McLaren & Hammer, 1996; Roe & van Eeten, 2004). In *Counternarratives: Cultural Studies and Critical Pedagogies in Postmodern Spaces* (1996) Lankshear and Peters propose to “turn in subsequent chapters to specific examples of postmodern counternarratives” (p. 30). However, Chapter 2, “Is there a place for cultural studies in the colleges of education” by Henry Giroux resembles a long string of arguments with no attempt at narrative. Chapter 2 justifies the use of cultural studies as a school of thought by giving reasons it should be adopted by educators. Giroux begins with a historical account of cultural studies and its emergence. He then describes the benefits of cultural studies by advancing three main arguments: (a) allows for increased interdisciplinary work; (b) gives us the tools to analyze the emerging media(ted) culture; and (c) rejects expertise in academia. He concludes by showing that college educators can use cultural studies. In no place does Giroux outline characters, plots, or events that create a story. At best, we could attribute the historical section as fulfilling this function but it is not meant to be a story; instead, it is purely descriptive. Nevertheless, Lankshear and Peters consider this a counternarrative because it creates space for the discussion of alternative

viewpoints. However, using this standard in isolation is inadequate because it does not draw a bright line for what is and what is not *counternarrative*. Defining counternarrative by function fails to create a bright line determining the boundaries of counternarrative. This limits the explanatory power of a theory of counternarrative. Therefore, the form of a counternarrative must “consist of events, actions, intentions, characters, and plots. These items are connected in some way, frequently it is required that they be organized in causal sequences. The causal sequences makes [sic] up a meaningful, coherent whole with a beginning, middle, and an end” (Kverbekk, 2002, p. 651). Additionally, counternarrative must make counter-arguments against dominant narratives. In sum, counternarrative must be in narrative form and maintain the two main functions outlined earlier: challenging official narratives and invigorating public debate.

### *Positive Narratives and Negative Counternarratives*

The counternarrative should be in direct response to a specific narrative. It should be agonistic in nature. To understand this more thoroughly we turn to argumentation theory to outline what it means to be a counterargument. It might be helpful to think of narratives and arguments in two different ways. Narratives oriented toward only proving their conclusion are positive narratives. On the other hand, narratives that refute other narratives specifically are counternarratives or negative narratives (Apotheloz, Brandt, and Gustavo, 1992, p. 173).

A good example of a positive narrative is the book *1984*. In *1984* Orwell constructs his story around a main character, Winston, who lives in a totalitarian state. Winston works in the records department for the Ministry of Truth in the mythical Oceania. His job is to destroy all evidence that history is being changed. When Big Brother, the ruling tyrant, decides that Emmanuel Goldstein (Big Brother's former partner) is an enemy of the state, Winston's job is to destroy all evidence that proves that Goldstein was once an ally. Even though Winston is a member of the Party, the ruling class of Oceania, he never really believes their propaganda. He keeps a journal, falls in love, and tries to escape the tyranny of Big Brother, all offenses that are punishable by death. Eventually, Big Brother catches Winston and forces him to reform so that he becomes an advocate of Big Brother. *1984* is a cautionary tale about the power of the state and media to create a totalitarian society. Orwell's story is an allegory and the lesson is that democracy is our check against oppression. Because *1984* does not explicitly and directly refute any specific narrative, it is not a counternarrative. It might be attempting to create space for alternative views but it is not explicitly and directly trying to refute an established narrative. Positive narratives exist within or in addition to established narratives. Conversely, counternarratives attempt to displace established narratives by refuting their internal logic and form.

Apotheloz, Brandt, and Gustavo (1992) have defined counter-argumentation as “negative argumentation that attacks the reasons that can be or have been formulated in favor of a conclusion, and whose result is the construction of a new argument (a counter-argument), anti-oriented to the preceding one” (p. 173). In this

light, a narrative dialectic exists when *Text A*, a counternarrative, counters *Text B* and then reestablishes *Text B*'s claims as arguments to be refuted. In addition, following Freeley (2004) we can define four characteristics of refutation: identify the argument, state your position, introduce your evidence, and demonstrate the impact. Refutation is a defining feature of counternarrative. Counternarratives involve attacking an official narrative by identifying the argument in the narrative and then refuting it. This process can be seen in *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Moore blends visual and discursive elements to construct direct arguments against the Bush administration's official narrative of the War on Terror and Iraq. For example, when Moore shows Bush responding to a question about Osama Bin Laden and his whereabouts Bush says "I don't think about him that much" (Moore, 2004, p. 35). Moore then asks, "What kind of President was this guy who didn't think about the man responsible for 9/11" (Moore, 2004, p. 35)? Then to answer his own question he jumps to another clip of Bush stating, "I'm a war President, I come to this office (the oval office) with war on my mind" (Moore, 2004, p. 36). Moore proceeds to refute Bush's claim that his administration is concerned about terrorism and Al Qaeda. Moore reduces the entire Bush response to 9/11 as one motivated by money. This is just one example of a counter-argument that exists in the larger counternarrative structure of the film. It is also an example of what makes this movie a counternarrative and not just another narrative that runs alongside official narratives.

If we limit the discussion of counternarrative to direct response to another narrative then it will be easier for the rhetorical scholar to track the development of

argumentative narratives and their rhetorical power. This will enable us to explain why some are compelling. In the case of war in Iraq, the administration couched their arguments in narrative fashion: Saddam as antagonist; Bush and his administration as protagonists; the U.S. combating a great evil; and the list goes on. Within this larger narrative structure are arguments about American values and inferences about how we should act. It is not coincidental that narrative has been a vehicle for axiological arguments because many theorists recognize the power of narrative to inculcate values (Bennett & Edelman (1985); Fisher, 1987, 1984; Mcgee & Nelson, 1985; Rowland 1987, 1988). Therefore, understanding narrative arguments and their rebuttals enables us to understand how narrative truth changes.

A limited definition of counternarrative will accrue important advantages. First, it will move the study of narrative from monological explanations of narrative to a broader definition that incorporates counternarratives. Narrative theory must explain how narratives interact with each other and influence audiences. Second, a limited definition provides structure. Structure in research is important because it increases the explanatory power of a theory or method. Every method focuses on a particular aspect of a text: narrative, metaphor, genre, and so forth. Each examines a text from different perspectives and may reach different conclusions. The method delimits the analysis and conclusions drawn from a theory. This is desirable because not every text should be explained by narrative theory.

#### Functions of the Counternarrative



Counternarratives have two primary functions: refutation and invigorating public debate. Counternarratives invigorate debate by drawing out contradictions and inconsistencies in official narratives. This section will explain how counternarratives function to refute official narratives and stimulate public deliberation.

### *Counternarrative as Refutation of Official Narratives*

One function of counternarratives is refuting official narratives. Official narratives are dominant narratives put forth by elites. These narratives originate from the state, the educational system, the penal system, the media, the judicial apparatus, military, and other institutions which claim a hegemonic status in society. Official narratives tend to explain the world using modernist standards of truth as developed during the Enlightenment. Official narratives reinforce a view of history as universal and linear. This is usually the case with narratives that governments proffer. State narratives rely on Enlightenment values of progress, freedom, and reason. Pease (1997) agrees by noting: “The metanarratives nations fashioned out of them constituted the historically effective mechanisms whereby the Enlightenment's ideals of freedom and equality were transmuted into universal "rights" rather than local demands” (p. 1).

Official narratives have an epistemological function that is to legitimize knowledge for citizens. Because the institutions from which they originate reside in a place of privilege they are able to construct narratives which function to exclude other viewpoints and narratives. This can be done in a single text or a bricolage of texts.

Their explanations of reality tend to become the “common sense” of the day. Bush’s September 20, 2001 State of the Union address to the American public after 9/11 is one example of an official narrative explaining a particular event to a particular audience and functioning to create triumphal episodes where the state is embattled against a known or unknown enemy that must be vanquished. Often official narratives are appealing “because they embody our fears, hopes and prejudices of the cultures in which their audiences live” (Bennett & Edelman, 1985, p. 157-158). These official narratives are repeated in both structure and content so often that they become normalized. They become the easy explanations for publics to accept.

Counternarratives change public perceptions of narrative truth by exposing contradictions of official narratives using narrative argument. Lyotard (1979) argues that narrative construction is often violent because it has to fit oppositions into its story. Most often, the violence manifests itself as psychological and structural. The “fitting” of oppositions often erases difference and creates a homogeneity that did not exist before and sometimes after. Žižek expounds on this process by stating “narrative as such emerges in order to resolve some fundamental antagonism by rearranging its terms into a temporal succession. It is thus the very form of narrative which bears witness to some repressed antagonism” (1996, p. 10). Antagonisms are dialectical in nature and counternarrative exposes these antagonisms. This has material consequences for audiences because the counternarrative-narrative dialectic is constitutive of their political positionality. The designations which are created by this dialectic defines the audience as apathetic because they do not feel involved in

the process of deliberation; submissive because they do not have the resources to object or they benefit from official narrative; or oppositional because they have access to information to refute. Counternarratives arise out of these oppositional audiences to challenge the validity of official narratives using argumentative counternarratives based on their culturally and socially specific positionality. Oppositional narratives often take the form of direct refutation or what I am calling counternarratives because they expose the contradictions and inconsistencies of official narratives. These contradictions become sites of resistance and from here counternarratives begin to circulate, spread, and displace hegemonic narratives.

It is the role of the rhetorical critic to identify when and how these political/narrative shifts come to pass. This is precisely why we need to infuse the term counternarrative with meaning, because without a language to identify the process it becomes harder to recognize the situations where oppositional audiences are using narrative to refute official stories. This is a dangerous environment where shifts in narrative appear to happen rapidly and without warning. But we know this does not have to be the case; rhetorical scholars armed with effective theoretical tools can predict these shifts in narratives and cultural practices like Burke (1939) did in *The Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle*.

### *Counternarrative Invigorates Public Debate*

Discussion about the process of a narrative dialectic is rife with political implications. Burke (1969) views dialectic as transformative which helps explain

how counternarratives function to dislodge official narratives and develop new narratives. He argues that the dialectic constitutes a merger of dualisms that pushes us towards transcendence. Counternarratives that bring localized knowledge to the forefront are based on rejecting common assumptions about the world. To assume “a functional view of narrative conceived as a moment of argument intrinsic to reason and practiced especially, but not exclusively, in politics” (McGee & Nelson, 1985, p. 140) is to understand the inherently political and public nature of narratives and counternarratives. Counternarratives can contribute to politics by revealing ulterior motives of those who seek to create acceptance of a politics that may not be in the public’s best interest. Fisher (1985) asserts, “a significant feature of compelling stories is that they provide a rationale for decision and actions” (p. 264). If this is true then the danger of false stories can be considerable. Counternarratives vie for acceptance against official narratives in the public sphere. During this dialectical process audiences are forced to make a decision even if they make those decisions without all the available information. Understanding this process is critical if we are able to understand how political landscapes change.

#### How to Evaluate the Narrative-Counternarrative Dialectic

In evaluating the counternarrative dialectic, I will use narrative probability, narrative fidelity, and rational argument testing. After I show a need for a systemic way to evaluate the dialectic I will show how rational argument testing and the

dialectical tier contribute to the process. This process will be critical for understanding the dialectic when applied to narrative theory.

Dialectics can create tensions through the process of using arguments to expose contradictions and inconsistencies within narratives. This works because it focuses on direct argumentation with an opponent. Understanding narrative dialectically means that it is possible to advance grounded judgments of narratives. This position counters the postmodern impulse to tear down objective standards of evaluation which has undermined the ability of some scholars to make critical judgments about the value of a particular narrative. For Lyotard (1979) there is no universal set of norms by which to ascribe value to one narrative over another; hence all narratives should be treated equal. Fisher (1987) makes similar arguments in his book *Human Communication as Narration*: “no form of discourse is privileged over others” (1987, p. 49). Fisher (1987) believes that privileging one narrative over another is philosophically and ethically bankrupt. He argues that bad stories cannot have fidelity, which he defines as “whether or not the stories ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives” (p. 5) because bad stories do not respect basic human dignity. Fisher’s example of a bad story is Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, but this fails his own test because it held fidelity for the entire state of Germany (Burke, 1939). The failure of narrative rationality to account for narratives such as these only exemplifies the ambiguity of its system of evaluation. However, the inability to make cogent decisions about value as they relate to public argument is a step toward policy confusion and political paralysis. In this section I make a case for three standards

necessary for evaluating counternarratives: probability, fidelity, and rational argument testing. Counternarratives which do not meet these standards cannot fulfill the functions of refuting official narratives and invigorating public debate.

### *Narrative Probability*

Fisher defines narrative probability as “whether the story hangs together” (1987, p. 47). He proposes that we assess it in three ways: argumentative or structural coherence; material coherence, and characterlogical coherence. Argumentative coherence tests if the narrative is coherent and if all parts of the narrative are consistent. Material coherence compares and contrasts stories against the narrative to ascertain if important facts or relevant issues have been ignored. Fisher’s test of material coherence is relevant to counternarratives but he never explains how audiences make decisions based on other stories. In fact, Fisher only uses material coherence to test a single narrative. Fisher never examines how counternarratives displace official narratives by offering ignored issues or facts as reasons to reject status quo narratives. Fisher only uses material coherence as a way to explain the internal consistency of a single narrative.

Characterlogical coherence is a test of the ethos of the characters. Fisher describes its importance by stating “whether a story is believable depends on the reliability of characters, both as narrators and actors. Determination of one’s character is made by interpretations of the person’s decisions and actions that reflect values” (1987, p. 47). Olsen (2003) argues that determining narrator reliability

requires three points of view: the narrator, the implied audience, and the totality of the context. In this respect when we attempt to determine characterlogical coherence we should examine what the narrator and the targeted audience believed, and the overall cultural/historical environment. These elements are important for determining the characterlogical coherence and narrative probability overall. Determining the other two types of coherence, argumentative and material, can only be assessed by using a form of rational argument testing. Determining the argumentative quality of narrative is to test the narrative or counternarrative against all available evidence.

### *Narrative Fidelity*

Fisher (1987) uses the logic of good reasons to determine the fidelity of a narrative. As mentioned above, Fisher (1987) defines “fidelity” as “whether or not stories ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives” (p. 5). Fisher claims, “good reasons are the stuff of stories, the means by which humans realize their nature as reason-valuing animals” (1984, p. 8). He elaborates on this in his book by noting that “narrative rationality focuses on good reasons—elements that provide warrants for accepting or adhering to the advice fostered by any form of communication that can be considered rhetorical” (Fisher, 1987, p. 48). He outlines the five tests for good reasons: (a) what are the values in the message; (b) is it relevant; (c) what are the consequences of adherence to this narrative; (d) is the narrative consistent; and (e) does the narrative outline the ideal way to act in a given situation (Fisher, 1987)?

Fisher's logic of good reasons does not test competing narrative claims. Instead, Fisher uses his logic of good reasons to test the argumentative strength of a narrative and its strategies, but not to resolve the struggle between narratives. This is due to the fact that Fisher wants to move away from dialectical reasoning. Fisher tells us that we should apply the tests of fact, relevance, consequence, consistency and transcendent issue to every argument which involves values because this will determine narrative fidelity. In other words, critics will examine the counternarrative to determine if the narrative "hangs together" and/or "rings true" (Fisher, 1987). These are good tests but they need to be supplemented with other tests which account for the argumentative narratives which vie for the same audiences.

Audiences understand the world from their particular viewpoint and through their own terministic screens. This has important implications for how audiences evaluate a narrative dialectic because an audience's terministic screens inform what they already believe to be true. Audience disposition must be taken into account in any persuasive act. Narrative fidelity is most useful when it takes into account the world beyond the narrative itself. Terministic screens create frames which inform how we understand the world. Burke (1966) argues, "what we take as 'reality' may be but the spinning out of possibilities implicit in our particular choice of terms" (p. 46). Ultimately, how we view truth in the world as individuals helps structure what we find to be a compelling argument. The complication of these terministic screens is that they are individual. Devolving assessment to the individual leads to an infinite regression resulting in relativism. So how do we overcome the relativism that is



inherent in this doctrine? First, terministic screens are formed around a “collective revelation” (Burke, 1966, p. 53). They are based on our experiences but there is a collective frame that we all share. That frame involves language, the negative, narrative/dramatism, and the dialectic. These collective frames undergird our ability to (inter)act, because they create norms, expectations, and community. Audiences understand the world through a complex set of experiences that determine their assumptions about truth, reality, and politics. Terministic screens activate meaning in a particular context and build that meaning into a framework by which audiences judge rhetorical artifacts. Since the bombing of the World Trade Center pictures of firefighters may trigger a particular contextual meaning of what it means to be a firefighter: hero, altruism, everything that is good with humanity and Americans. These frames can become condensation symbols which access our value systems. Zarfesky (2004) explains:

a situation can be defined by identifying it with one or more condensation symbols. These are symbols which designate no clear referent but "condense" a host of different meanings and connotations that otherwise might diverge. They are particularly useful in defining an ambiguous situation because people can highlight different aspects of the symbol yet reach the same conclusion. For example, President Clinton's approach to the budget surpluses of the late 1990s was "Save Social Security first." Saving Social Security is a theme with positive resonance, even though people mean different things by it. The symbol of saving this cherished program gathers

support from among people who may have different reasons for offering it and who may mean different things by it. The power of the definition is its ability to condense divergent emotional reactions. (2004, pp. 612-613)

Condensation symbols are crucial when dealing with a narrative argument in visual form because along with words pictures are used as condensation symbols. These symbols get added to our experiences and become part of our terministic screens.

Recognizing and evaluating the counternarratives at work on any particular narrative is important to determine if the narrative is consistent or if the narrative outlines a reasonable action. If no counternarratives exist then official narratives create the basis for ideal action by default, but when counterarguments and hence counternarratives are involved that may change how the narrative is evaluated. Applying the logic of good reasons tests can still be done but it should be done at the points of clash. Critics should apply the tests of relevance, consequences, and action to specific counter-arguments. This is the blueprint on how these public decisions can be, and are, made.

### *Rational Argument Testing*

To understand the argumentative role of counternarrative it is important to comprehend the process of argument evaluation. By stretching the counters of rational argument testing to include comparing and contrasting the premises against each other and reality, and critically questioning its assumptions we can determine the

strength of any argument. But before we can do that we need to determine what an argument is.

Govier (2005) defines argument as “a set of claims in which one or more of the claims, are put forward so as to offer reasons for another claim, the conclusion” (p. 2). Govier’s definition outlines three fundamental parts to an argument claims, reasons, and conclusions. Each argument consist of a conclusion “which premises are intended as support” (Govier, 2005, p.22). In order to evaluate an argument accurately we must be able to standardize its form by using this premise-conclusion structure. Standardizing the argument structure can be done in three steps: first identify the conclusion; second identify its premises of support; and third arrange the statements in a logical manner with the premises leading up to the conclusion; Placing an argument in this standardized form will allow the critic to evaluate the strength of the premises, conclusions, and reasons given by a rhetor in his construction of argument. To determine the strength of an argument Govier argues that we should use three tests: acceptability, relevancy, and grounds (ARG). The evaluation of argument happens when critics determine the acceptability of the premises and then evaluate the reasoning from premises to conclusions (Govier, 2005). If the premises are reasonable and the structure is good then an argument is considered strong or cogent. Testing cogency of an argument is done by testing acceptability, relevancy, and if the premises “provide sufficient or good grounds for the conclusion” (Govier, 2005, p. 64).

Acceptable premises are ones that would be reasonable to a reasonable person. In other words, an argument is acceptable if “it is reasonable for those to whom the argument addressed to accept the premises” (Govier, 2005, p. 63). Govier gives several guidelines for testing the acceptability of premises while warning us that this is not a complete set of rules. A premise may be acceptable if it is: supported by a cogent subargument, supported elsewhere in the literature on the topic, known to a priori true, common knowledge, testimony, and/or from a proper authority. If a premise is supported by a cogent subargument then the rhetor must supply evidence and reasons that the premise is already rational and hence should be accepted. To show that the claim is supported elsewhere is to reference or cite an authority on the topic to prove that the claim is a reasonable claim. A priori claims are definitional or technical claims, which logically follow, based on the terms used. For example, a square has four sides or a person cannot steal their own property. Each of these statements is considered a priori because if you own the property by definition you cannot steal it. In addition, if a figure is a square it must have four sides. Using testimony to determine acceptability of a premise is an integral part of human knowledge acquisition considering we know most of what we know from what other people have told us about the world. This is especially true when we deal with the unknown. We accept that many objects exist that we do not have direct experience with because others have seen them and told us. In determining the acceptability of testimony there are three important considerations. These are plausibility of the claim asserted, the reputation of the person asserting the claim, and if the claim “goes

beyond the experience and competence of the person who tells us it is true” (Govier, 2005, p. 138). If the person claims something that goes beyond common knowledge audiences are unlikely to accept it as true. Moreover, if a person asserting the claim has a poor reputation people are unlikely to accept the premises or the conclusion. And claims can be deemed unacceptable if they go beyond the competence or experience of the person making the claim. Sometimes this may be hard to determine. Govier gives the example of a journalist, David Lamb, discussing Africa and making this claim: “The Church did not play an active role in supporting the African’s struggle for independence, largely because white clergy in Africa were racist in attitude and approach” (2005, p. 141). While this may be true without source citations or authority, this claim is unacceptable because it goes beyond his experience. Experts are often a source of acceptable premises. In the face of what some authors on narrative theory might argue, Fisher in particular, experts should have a place in determining the acceptability of a claim. Because expertise is based on sustained research and recognition by their peers these scholars are able to make acceptable claims outside of common knowledge. A person who studies history is more qualified to tell us about the causes of the civil war than an actor who presumably studies acting and not history. However, appeals to authority are not without problems. Often people cite experts to make claims in fields where that particular expert is not an expert. In this way, the evidence is not relevant to the premise.

Relevancy is another important characteristic of a strong argument. If a premise is used to support a conclusion, it seems obvious that it must be relevant to its conclusion. However, in many cases rhetors use premises to argue a conclusion that are not relevant to each other. In determining relevance, it is important to recognize that there are three types of relevance. These are positive relevance, negative relevance, and irrelevance. Positive relevance is defined as “A statement is positively relevant to another statement if and only if the truth of A counts in favor of the truth of B. This means that A provides some evidence for B, or some reason to believe that B is true” (Govier, 2005, p. 172). Negative relevance, on the other hand, is defined as “A statement A is negatively relevant to another statement if and only if the truth of A counts against the truth of B. This means that if A is true it provides some evidence or reason to think that B is not true” (Govier, 2005, p. 173). The last test of relevance is irrelevance. Govier (2005) defines irrelevance as “A statement A is irrelevant to another statement B if it is neither positively nor negatively relevant to B. When there is irrelevance, there is no relationship of logical support or logical undermining between the two statements. A does not provide a reason for B; nor does A provide a reason against B” (p. 173). Often rhetors use fallacies, which are associated with irrelevance such as straw man, guilt by association, appeals to authority, and appeals to ignorance.

The last characteristic of the ARG conditions is grounds. Grounds evaluate the way in which premises work together to increase or decrease the strength of an argument. There are two forms of grounds: deduction and induction. “One statement

deductively entails another if and only if it is impossible for the second one to be false, given that the first one is true” (Govier, 2005, p. 206). Govier (2005) argues that if an argument is deductively valid it satisfies both the relevancy and grounds conditions of an argument. For evaluation, purposes there are two different types of deduction: categorical and propositional. Categorical arguments can be broken into four forms, which are universal affirmation, particular affirmation, universal negation, and particular negation. Universal affirmation uses the term all to make statements like all whales are mammals. Particular affirmations use the statement some to denote that some members of the one category are also part of another. For example, some African Americans are male. The universal negative can be expressed in many ways. It might be no mammals lay eggs or dogs can’t fly or even there never was a tree that talked. What each of these statements have in common is that each statement negates an entire category of objects. The particular negative, on the other hand, negates only part of a category of things. Consider, not all master’s students are good writers. This statement makes clear that while not all of master’s students are good writers, there certainly are some who are. When universal and particular affirmation and negation are all combined they create the basis for identifying, standardizing, and evaluating the categorical form of arguments.

The second form of deduction is propositional logic. Propositional logic “deals with the relationships holding between simple propositions and their compounds. In propositional logic, the basic logical terms are not, or, and, and if/then” (Govier, 2005, p. 246). The validity of propositional logic lies in the

relationship of the premises to each other. In other words, the conditional relationship between statements makes the argument valid. If you eat too much then you will get fat. If the condition of eating too much is fulfilled then it follows that you will get fat. As long as the premises are true then the conclusions will also be true. In formal logic, the discussion of propositional logic is separated as different types of syllogisms. The if/then statements are called hypothetical or conditional syllogisms, while the use of the connector or designates the disjunctive syllogism. Govier refers to this type of argument as the exclusive disjunction. She argues that exclusive disjunction is “true if and only if one of the disjuncts is true” (Govier, 2005, p. 290). I can go either eat or play basketball. I went to play basketball therefore I can not go eat. In some instances both statements can be true. You might be faced with the choice I can go play basketball or go eat. And instead of choosing one and not the other you might choose both. I called Jon and he agreed to go eat at 5 and Brett and I will play basketball at 9. Govier calls these types of permutations inclusive disjunctions. Now that we have examined the deductive side of argument form it is time to move to induction.

Induction is “that which we extrapolate from experience to further conclusions” (Govier, 2005, p. 292). An archetypical example of induction is everyday the sun rises so it safe to say that tomorrow the sun will also rise. Induction allows us to predict the unknown from information that is known to us. Inductive arguments have the following characteristics according to Govier (2005): (1) the conclusion and premises are all empirical propositions; (2) the conclusion is not



inductively entailed by the premises; (3) the reasoning used to infer the conclusion from the premises is based on the underlying assumption that the regularities described in the premises will persist; and (4) the inference is either that unexamined cases will resemble examined ones or that evidence makes an explanatory hypothesis probable. When using induction scholars can make generalizations about the world. These inductive generalizations should be questioned on a few different levels. First, is sample representative of the population? Second, is the sample size large enough? And third, is the sample biased? These questions can help guide us in determining the cogency of an argument that relies on inductive generalizations as its conclusions. One problem encountered when using induction is the problem of causation. Distinguishing between correlation and cause can be a severe problem for constructing coherent and cogent inductive arguments. For example, Bush argues in his September 20, 2001 speech that the terrorists were motivated to attack the U.S. because they hate our freedoms. While this may seem like a reasonable argument, it is flawed. We do have a lot of freedom in America but there is only a correlation between this reality and the attacks. Even though both exist, freedom and the attacks, there is no direct causal evidence in Bush's reasoning. There is only a correlation between the premise and conclusion. Correlations can seem like cause if they are strong. A strong correlation is one that allows the critic to make a probable assertion. We might argue that the example of the rising sun is strong correlation while Bush's argument is weak correlation. Not knowing the difference between cause and correlation invites fallacies in rhetor's arguments. The most common fallacies are

post hoc, begging the question, slippery slope, confusing correlation with cause, and objectionable cause. Knowing the difference between a strong and a weak argument is crucial if we are going to analyze and construct them.

Nonetheless, an argument may be formally valid and correspond to reality but still not be strong if it cannot withstand critical questioning. Building upon Plato, Johnson (2000) envisions argumentation as dialectical at its very core. Premises are offered and must then undergo a method of critical questioning. For Johnson (2000) form follows function. We have to understand how it functions as persuasion of the Other. Arguments are teleological. They have a directed purpose of persuading the Other to the truth of a thesis. This is done through the process of reasoning which leads a person “rationally to accept the claim in question” (Johnson, 2000, p. 149). Claims and premises are what Johnson calls the illative core of argument. By moving away from syllogistic structure, Johnson (2000) cautions us about accepting structure as validity. While structure is important, it should not be the defining characteristic of good argument. Johnson adds to his theory of argument an additional step: the dialectical tier. An argument may be formally valid and have true premises but still be weak if it cannot withstand critical questioning. For Johnson (2000) the dialectic is more than just questioning. He conceives of arguers as having dialectical obligations which force them to foreground their rebuttal arguments within their initial arguments. He calls this process the dialectical tier. He argues that the first level of the tier, the “illative core”, follows the claims-reasons structure. Within this structure, each premise must have reasons or evidence to support the “target

proposition, which is the conclusion” (160). In the second tier, Johnson (2000) argues that while the structure of the argument may be correct it does not mean that there will be persuasion of the Other. If persuasion is to be rational then Others will formulate “standard objections” to arguments. To persuade the Other, the arguer “is obliged to take account of these objections and opposing viewpoints” (p. 160). However, “if the arguer fails to deal with well known objections, this is a serious lapse” (p. 164) because according to Johnson the rhetor has failed to make an argument. In other words, if the arguer does not speak to obvious objections then it is likely that she will fail in her attempt to persuade the Other.

Johnson has been criticized by theorists (Govier, 1998; Leff, 2000; Tindale, 2002; van Rees, 2001) for having an overly restrictive definition of argument. Hansen argues that Johnson reliance on manifest rationality is overly restrictive. Hansen (2002) argues that there are plenty of arguments which do not have the dialectical tier nor are they entirely rational. Rees also agrees with Hansen that argument need not have a dialectical tier in order to be thought of as argument. Furthermore, Hansen (2002) argues that Johnson’s theory of argument lacks a rhetorical dimension which is necessary to understand how rhetors use argument to persuade. Each of these criticisms is legitimate. For the purpose of this thesis, I will agree with Johnson’s structure of argument, including the dialectical tier. However, I will argue that the dialectical tier is simply an additional reason or persuasive technique. In other words, the dialectical tier is not definitive of argument, but is useful in talking about the persuasive and rhetorical dimension of argumentation.

Narrative arguments should also be tested against reality. Rowland (1987, 1988) and Warnick (1987) recognize that narratives never arise in a vacuum and that we must consider factors outside the quality of the narrative's construction to determine its fidelity. When narrative functions as argument "it is constrained not just by standards of coherence and probability, but by the world itself" (Rowland, 1987, p. 270); hence the strength of a story can be based on various factors outside of the internal consistency of the narrative: "If narrative fidelity and probability are to be useful tests of public argument, they must test not merely the story, but the story in relation to the world" (Rowland, 1987, p. 270). These tests are important for a theory of counternarrative. Understanding the structure of argument opens up the space for deconstructing an argument's truth-value and its form. Recognizing the importance of comparing narratives to reality allows the critic to analyze how culture and context play an important role in determining how narratives and counternarratives function. Lastly, analyzing the counterarguments, which exist for any premise-conclusion complex, and then testing them as valid can show the places where persuasion fails. In certain cases, audiences may infer or imply the conclusion from the premises that are given. However, a skilled arguer will attack an argument at the level of assumption, implication, and inference. Furthermore, they will question the use of evidence and reasoning in the construction of a conclusion. The same process is true for counternarrative. For counternarrative to engender adherence it attacks the weak points of a narrative. Those weak points are the assumptions made by the initial arguer in developing his premise-conclusion complex or it is the reasons and evidence

given to support a premise. Either way dialectical reasoning is important to this process because it questions narratives using rational argument testing or the dialectical tier, which can explain how narrative persuasive strategies function. Simply, to understand and refute narrative persuasion the counternarrative must use all available evidence to predict and refute the official narrative's standard objections that will be brought against the message. Using this design, we can understand how official narratives fade away or stay entrenched. By testing the acceptability, relevancy, grounds, and dialectical composition of counternarrative critics will be able to predict and explain which counternarratives will be successful.

### Conclusion

This chapter made three main arguments: (a) while counternarratives share many of the same qualities as narrative they are distinct because they are in direct response to a particular official narrative; (b) counternarratives function to open space for alternative stories that have been marginalized in the construction of hegemonic/official narratives; and (c) even though Fisher's narrative rationality has its problems, narrative fidelity and probability along with rational argument testing can be used to evaluate the narrative-counternarrative dialectic. It is my contention that by testing the arguments, characters, and other aspects of the counternarrative we can assess why certain narratives engender adherence. Moreover, we can also see how a particular narrative which seems like truth can be displaced in a world of competing narratives. Importantly, narratives always compete for adherence but only

in the case of the counternarrative is there a direct tradeoff, where the more you believe one the less you believe the other. It is this process that no rhetorical scholars have written about and to which this thesis is devoted.

In chapter three I will examine the construction of the Bush official narrative ranging from 9/11 to the invasion in Iraq. I will show how this particular narrative became the prevailing truth and the strategies used to undermine counternarrative construction.

### Chapter 3: The Official Bush Narrative

The official narrative detailing our nation's attitude and response to 9/11 was compiled through a number of presidential public addresses creating a narrative reinforcing American values of freedom, democracy, and justice. This chapter will unpack the construction and functions of the Bush narrative from 9/11 to his October 7, 2002 speech. Since it is not possible to talk about every piece of presidential rhetoric, I will analyze five presidential speeches: Bush's September 20, 2001 *Address to the Nation*, January 29, 2002 *State of the Union*, June 1, 2002 *The West Point Graduation Speech*, the September 12, 2002 *Remarks to the UN*, and the October 7, 2002 *Iraq Threat Speech*. I chose these speeches for two reasons. First, they are representative of the discourse which engendered the official narrative. Second, they are chronologically the five speeches that constructed the narrative from 9/11 to Bush's first declaration to use force in Iraq. Bush achieved control over the rhetorical environment by capitalizing on a rhetorical vacuum left by the tragedy of 9/11. In the place of tolerance and debate Bush created an environment that discouraged deliberation and dissent through the use of epideictic rhetoric. This chapter explains the form and function of Bush's post 9/11 rhetoric, and specifically how Bush created a rhetorical environment that discouraged deliberation and dissent.

#### The Form of Bush's Post 9/11 Rhetoric

I will analyze Bush's post 9/11 rhetoric as war rhetoric because these speeches form a rhetorical trajectory that justifies the intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq. The five

characteristics of presidential war rhetoric as developed by Campbell and Jameson (1990) are:

(1) every element in it proclaims that the momentous decision to resort to force is deliberate, the product of thoughtful consideration; (2) forceful intervention is justified through a chronicle or narrative from which argumentative claims are drawn; (3) the audience is exhorted to unanimity of purpose and total commitment; (4) the rhetoric not only justifies the use of force but also seeks to legitimate presidential assumption of the extraordinary powers of the commander in chief; and as a function of these other characteristics (5) strategic misrepresentations play an unusually significant role in its appeals. (105)

Silberstein (2002) has noted that “war rhetoric, after all, dominated the White House communication after September 11” (p. 11) and continues to this day. Two things have become obvious since 9/11. First, the problem of 9/11 and terrorism was, and continues to be, a rhetorical problem; and second the president’s war rhetoric was designed to unify the nation and justify future interventions. Bush’s post 9/11 rhetoric should be analyzed from a narrative perspective because it is narrative. Therefore, in each subsection I will discuss elements of the narrative paradigm such as protagonists, plots, and the chronological order of events. I will break the narrative up into the five main themes of war rhetoric: narrative, unification, justification of



intervention and expansion of governmental powers, strategic misrepresentation, and thoughtful consideration.

### *Justified Through Narrative*

Nine days after September 11 Bush begins his narrative. During the September 20, 2001 *Address to the Nation* Bush spoke to a joint session of congress and the nation. It was his first speech to the nation following 9/11, and in it he attempted to manage several rhetorical exigencies. Who committed these acts of terrorism? What is being done by the government? When will this all be over? And possibly the most important question why? Bush framed his answers in narrative form. He begins this speech with “In a normal course of events” (Bush, 2001), which begins the narrative arc. After exalting the courage of the rescuers and the passengers of United flight 93 he particularizes the chronological aspect of the narrative by stating: “for the last nine days the world has seen the state of our union and it is strong” (Bush, 2001). Bush takes a step back and marks the beginning of this narrative as September 11: “On September 11th enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country” (Bush, 2001). This allows Bush to construct a temporal break with the past, move into the present, and construct an image of the future. He then builds on the date by demarcating definitive lines of good and evil arguing this is just the beginning: “if an emboldened regime were to supply these weapons to terrorist allies, then the attacks of September the 11th would be a prelude to far greater horrors” (Bush, 2002d). Bush’s strategy is to control the framing and

understanding of the past and future events. A significant part of controlling the future through narrative is constructing worthy enemies.

Narratives always have characters, plots, and action. For Bush the characters are easy to identify. Bush elevates himself and his administration to hero status given the mission to obliterate the evil that wants to destroy our way of life. Bush constructs the evil as terrorism and specifically Al Qaeda. He argues that they are evil in every respect and to prove this point Bush invokes American's desire to protect women and children by stating, "Targeting innocent civilians for murder is always and everywhere wrong. Brutality against women is always and everywhere wrong. There can be no neutrality between justice and cruelty, between the innocent and the guilty. We are in a conflict between good and evil, and America will call evil by its name. By confronting evil and lawless regimes, we do not create a problem, we reveal a problem. And we will lead the world in opposing it" (Bush, 2001). Bush rhetorically constructs "we" as the heroes and saviors in this epic battle against evil, portraying us as pure and our cause as just: "We fight, as we always fight, for a just peace -- a peace that favors human liberty. We will defend the peace against threats from terrorists and tyrants" (Bush, 2002b). Once Bush develops the enemy as he does throughout the speeches from 2001-2003 he completes the enthymeme by arguing that intervention and sacrifice are necessary. Because only through sacrificing life and liberty will we return to peace. In many of his speeches, he reminds us that we have an historic opportunity to preserve peace. We have our best

chance since the rise of the nation state in the seventeenth century to build a world where the great powers compete in peace instead of prepare for war (Bush, 2002b).

The narrative is consistent and simple throughout all of Bush's rhetoric. There is evil out there and it must be defeated, we are the ones to do it no matter the costs, and if we do not fight, they will destroy us. Within this narrative, the evil begins as Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and Osama Bin Laden but as Bush switches focus, the evil changes to Iraq and Saddam. Over this time, Bush's rhetoric has all components of war rhetoric. However, most important in his narrative is the way it crushes dissent and deliberation. Bush's rhetoric elevates the level of fear and nationalism to create a unified citizenry for that war and against dissent. From 2001 to 2003 the Bush administration got every piece of legislation they wanted, almost without any dissent (Kwaitowski, 2007). Bush was careful to construct the official narrative as one that placed Americans on the side of justice and liberty.

### *Unification*

Bush's post-9/11 rhetoric to unify the nation constructed enemies and reestablished national identity. I will focus on three specific unification strategies of Bush's post 9/11 rhetoric. First, I will unpack Bush's use of demonizing rhetoric as a means to unify the polis and silence dissent. Second, I will look at the use of guilt appeals as a strategy of unification. Finally, I will analyze Bush's use of "we" and how he constructs an American identity in the wake of 9/11.

As Bush builds his case against Al Qaeda and later against Iraq, Bush relies on evil as the defining characteristic of the enemy that he uses to unify the nation and create a Manichean policy perspective. During the September 20, 2001 speech Bush resolves who attacked us by stating, “The evidence we have gathered all points to a collection of loosely affiliated terrorist organizations known as al Qaeda” (Bush, 2001). After identifying the enemy he immediately begins to construct the enemy through such terms as “murderers,” “extremists,” “evil,” “destructive,” “fascism,” “Nazism,” and “totalitarianism.” Each word functions as a condensation point allowing the audience to draw upon cultural references to create an image of the enemy as irredeemable. Bush (2001) stated that the Al Qaeda terrorists were “enemies of freedom” and that “the civilized world is rallying to America's side” demarcating the lines between those who want freedom and civilization and the terrorists. Bush further depicts the enemy by describing them as “a fringe form of Islamic extremism ...a fringe movement that perverts the peaceful teachings of Islam...the terrorists’ directive commands them to kill Christian and Jews, to kill all Americans, and make no distinction between military and civilian, including women and children” (Bush, 2001). This is in stark contrast to how Americans view themselves as pure and righteous. The terrorists are irredeemable and evil; therefore, we “should be assured in our righteousness of our cause” (Bush, 2001). Demonizing and unifying at the same time, Bush pushes this further by forcing the world to choose sides: “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” (Bush, 2001). Bush constructs the

narrative as one above deliberation and focused on decision by focusing on its temporality, the now. The audience must decide *tonight* whose side it is on--the righteous or the evil. There are no grey areas and his government has already chosen its side. By creating a sense of rhetorical urgency, Bush asked for immediate allegiance for his interpretation of events. Demonizing rhetoric is nothing new in presidential war rhetoric. Bush uses this address to construct the enemy and to heighten his campaign to unify the nation by discouraging dissent (Silberstein, 2002). The use of enemy imagery to construct the terrorist, unify the nation, and promote democracy and freedom is a clear goal of Bush's post 9/11 rhetoric.

Demonizing the Other is not the only function of Bush's rhetoric of evil. Bush also uses the rhetoric of evil to implicate the American conscience. During the January 20th address Bush tells us:

None of us would ever wish the evil that was done on September the 11th...For too long our culture has said, 'If it feels good, do it.' Now America is embracing a new ethic and a new creed: 'Let's roll.' In the sacrifice of soldiers...firefighters, and... ordinary citizens, we have glimpsed what a new culture of responsibility could look like. We want to be a nation that serves goals larger than self. We've been offered a unique opportunity, and we must not let this moment pass. (Bush, 2002a)

Bush describes the time before 9/11 as a time when Americans were greedy and morally corrupt. By indicting the American character and associating it with the

terrorist attacks, Bush pursued the American electorate's guilty conscience (Semmler, 2003). Guilt is a powerful motivating force. When we feel guilty we are less likely to question motives or the cogency of an argument. Instead, we desire to remove the guilt (Aronson & Pratkanis, 1991). In this case to rid ourselves of the guilt we embrace the narrative by becoming model citizens trusting in our leadership and supporting its decisions without question. Bush returns to a sense of urgency and crisis. This time there is an urgency to save the national character. He tells us that we are in a unique time one that must be seized immediately.

In the wake of 9/11 Bush reestablishes a threatened American identity in two distinct ways. First Bush accentuates the usage of "we", "us", and "our" in his rhetoric. Throughout his speeches he continually uses these terms to describe how the nation should be feeling, understanding and acting. Bush's use of "we", "us", and "our" in Bush's post 9/11 rhetoric functions to unify the nation around a particular national identity. In constructing the American "we" he simultaneously constructs his ideal audience. Burke (1969) reminds us that identification means that the audience and the rhetor become "substantially one" (p. 21). Murphy (2003) explains: "if discourse enters into identity, then the audience is a rhetorical effect. Who we are as a collective evolves from the discourses we commonly experience" (pp. 621-22). How Bush deploys the use of "we", "us" and "our" as defining what it means to be American is part of constructing an audience, models for action, and a unified public. Bush begins the 20 September address by giving us a model of how Americans act during a time of crisis by stating: "we have seen it in the courage of passengers, who

rushed terrorists to save others on the ground... We have seen the state of our Union in the endurance of rescuers, working past exhaustion. We have seen the unfurling of flags, the lighting of candles, the giving of blood, the saying of prayer” (Bush, 2001). He invokes the image of the rescue workers and the passengers of United 93 to create a condensation symbol. These images become reference points imbued with the qualities of the ideal American. Not all Americans are able to fight or rescue but all of us are capable of prayer, flag waving, and giving blood. Bush then moves to define Americans through their values: “we are in a fight for our principles, and our first responsibility is to live by them” (Bush, 2001). We are a country defined by our principles and values of “justice”, “freedom”, and “democracy”. Bush continues:

Great harm has been done to us. We have suffered great loss. And in our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment. Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human freedom – the great achievement of our time, and the great hope of every time – now depends on us. Our nation – this generation – will lift a dark threat of violence from our people and our future. We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail. (Bush, 2001)

Since “we” are defined by our principles, “we” should defend those principles. It should not be underestimated how the language of “we” functions to create an “us” against “them” mentality that reinforces Bush use of enemy imagery and the process of unification. By defining “we “ as a core values. Bush elevates unification and

conformity to the status of universal. To not follow the value of “we” would place someone on the margins as unpatriotic. This functionally privileges conformity over dissent and silence over deliberation.

Second Bush used synecdoche to become the voice of Americans; he outlined how we should feel and react to the events of 9/11. Murphy (2003) argues that through Bush’s use of synecdoche “the president established a synecdochal relationship with the people. He represented our experiences, feelings, and actions and spoke of those actions in our voice...He took full advantage of the ‘huge political opportunity’ offered by the 9/11 attacks by becoming the one voice of the nation” (p. 622). Bush became the model of a nation in crisis elevating his goals and actions as the goals and actions of the each individual American. As a model of action he tells us “I will not forget this wound to our country or those who inflicted it. I will not yield; I will not rest; I will not relent in waging this struggle for freedom and security for the American people” (Bush, 2001). Moreover, Bush concludes neither should we. In essence, Bush does the deciding so that we do not have to.

### *Justifying Intervention and the Expansion of Governmental Powers*

Bush justifies intervention into Iraq and Afghanistan by linking it to the fight for American values and security. The Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001, or the PATRIOT Act for short, has been the Bush administration’s answer to



domestic terrorism. Bush's rhetoric became the impetus for the passage of the Bush doctrine and the USA PATRIOT act.

During the September 20, 2001, speech after Bush answered the question of who bombed the World Trade Center it was important for Bush to explain why. In one of the most memorable parts of this speech, Bush asks and answers the question in this way:

Americans are asking why they hate us? They hate what we see right here in this chamber—a democratically elected government—their leaders are self appointed. They hate our freedoms—our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.

(Bush, 2001)

Bush's statements are meant to remind us that the American way of life must be defended. In this respect these propositions can be read in two different ways: (a) our way of life is great and sometimes we are called on to fight to defend it; and (b) that our way of life is so great that others are jealous and have decided that we need to be fought because our existence is a threat to their way of life. Bush uses both interpretations during the speech. In one part of the speech Bush reminds us that “with every atrocity, they hope America grows fearful, retreating from the world and forsaking our friends. They stand against us because we stand in their way” (Bush, 2001). This builds upon the latter interpretation by reminding us that the world is envious of our lifestyle and these particular people are so jealous that they want to

remove us. The former interpretation can be seen in this passage: “Tonight we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom. Our grief has turned to anger, and anger to resolution. Whether we bring our enemies to justice or justice to our enemies, justice will be done” (Bush, 2001). The purpose of this passage is evident. Bush taps into the values of justice and freedom as worth fighting for and a means to embolden the electorate. During his commencement address at West Point, he explains, “We fight, as we always fight, for a just peace -- a peace that favors human liberty” (2002b). Bush uses the recurring themes of justice and liberty as means to link to the purity of American purpose. This purity of purpose is linked, in a deliberative way, to the use of force to bring justice to our enemies even if that means preemptively.

Bush uses the platform of 9/11 to initiate a new foreign policy, known as the Bush Doctrine or the doctrine of preemption, which allows his government to expand the war on terror. Lieber and Lieber (2002) highlight the four main tenants of the Bush Doctrine: (1) it calls for the preemptive military action against hostile states and terrorist groups seeking to develop weapons of mass destruction; (2) the U.S. will not allow our military strength to be challenged by any foreign competitors; (3) the U.S. will act unilaterally if the need arises; (4) it is the new mission of the U.S. to spread democracy, especially in the Muslim world. While the Bush Doctrine was not unveiled until September 2002, Bush prepared the nation for months prior through the use of public address. Bush never mentions the Bush Doctrine by its official name, The National Security Strategy, but he makes multiple references to how U.S.

strategy has changed in the wake of 9/11. He argues in the January 29, 2002 State of the Union that America has two goals. First, Bush states, “These enemies view the entire world as a battlefield, and we must pursue them wherever they are” (Bush, 2002a). The implication is clear that the U.S. will invade any country that it deems as terrorist and then he follows with “some governments will be timid in the face of terror. And make no mistake about it. If they do not act, America will” (Bush, 2002a). Even though Bush highlights North Korea and Iran, he spends most of his time on Iraq. Bush tells us “Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror” (Bush, 2002a). He then pushes the audience to pick a side. Thus in one rhetorical motion Bush expands the war on terror to nation states which his administration deems a threat most notably Iraq. The second objective, which Bush outlines in this speech, is “to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction” (Bush, 2002a). At this point Bush begins to push aggressively and names the Axis of Evil: Iran, North Korea, and Iraq. In his June 1 commencement speech at West Point Bush states: “our security will require all Americans to be forward-looking and resolute, to be ready for preemptive action when necessary to defend our liberty and to defend our lives” (2002b). Statements such as this were expanded upon to become The National Security Strategy of the United States or the Bush Doctrine as it has been called.

The Bush Doctrine is significant because it allows for multiple interventions and it crushes dissent. The Bush doctrine is “manifesto” which calls for U.S.

intervention “war whenever and wherever an American president chooses” (Gitlin, 2003). Another effect of the Bush Doctrine, like the USA PATRIOT Act, is to quell internal dissent from Congress and the public: “when our nation conducts its business abroad this way...Democrats and Republicans alike... become ...patriotic. They do not condemn or ridicule, or demand reform and restitution. They go along with it, perhaps believing the endlessly charming stories told by...the White House” (Kwiatkowski, 2007, p. 3). There is a belief among Americans that when the country is at war it becomes incumbent for its citizens to support the war. Fear of anti-patriotic stigma guides many Americans to accept wars even if they disagree with the justifications (Gitlin, 2003). Unfortunately, there is more at work here than mere stigmatization. In the rhetorical environment post-9/11 speaking out against government policies also carried the risk of state sanctioned surveillance and/or imprisonment via the USA PATRIOT Act.

The USA PATRIOT Act’s goal is to enhance national security by increasing funding for the F.B.I., inter-agency information sharing, increased surveillance (particularly of Internet resources), and lowering the requirements for a search warrant. As with the Bush Doctrine, the President never mentions the USA PATRIOT Act directly during any of his speeches. In fact, the only time Bush ever mentions the USA PATRIOT Act by name is during the official signing, which happened on October 26, 2001. Even though he never mentions the Act by name there are allusions to it dating back to the September 20, 2001 State of the Union.

During the September 20, 2001 State of the Union, Bush makes two important allusions to the PATRIOT Act. First Bush justifies the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the expansion of presidential powers by stating, “Today, dozens of federal departments and agencies, as well as state and local governments, have responsibilities affecting homeland security. These efforts must be coordinated at the highest level. So tonight I announce the creation of a Cabinet-level position reporting directly to me -- the Office of Homeland Security” (Bush, 2001). Part of homeland security has been the passage of the PATRIOT Act. The USA PATRIOT act makes the DHS viable insofar as it grants it the power to function by expanding the government’s jurisdiction in matters of terrorism to the U.S. proper. Bush’s second allusion to the USA PATRIOT Act comes when he remarks “We will come together to give law enforcement the additional tools it needs to track down terror here at home. We will come together to strengthen our intelligence capabilities to know the plans of terrorists before they act, and find them before they strike” (Bush, 2001). Both of these comments are clear allusions to the USA PATRIOT Act because they are in the same language that he uses at the signing of the USA PATRIOT Act. Bush remarks, “It [The USA PATRIOT Act] will help law enforcement to identify, to dismantle, to disrupt, and to punish terrorists before they strike” (Bush, 2002b). He never explains what it means to “give law enforcement the additional tools it needs” or what coordinating agencies might entail. Since its passage the USA PATRIOT Act has been debated widely by its proponents and critics for its effects on security and civil liberties.

The PATRIOT Act influenced the rhetorical environment by expanding presidential powers and potentially limiting dissent. Nancy Chang (2002) states: “A number of the USA PATRIOT Acts provisions are uncontroversial. The act nevertheless stands out as radical in the degree to which it...consolidates new powers in the executive branch” (p. 43). Many of the provisions in the USA PATRIOT act are meant to give the government broad authority to combat terrorism. However, the definition of terrorist has been expanded to include domestic terrorism but it has been argued that it is overly broad Chang (2002) continues: “the act places our First Amendment rights to freedom of speech and political association in jeopardy by creating a broad new crime of domestic terrorism and denying entry to noncitizens on the basis of ideology” ( p .44). Under Section 501 any American citizen who is exercising their freedom of speech and right to assembly can be “picked off the streets or from home and taken to a secret military tribunal with no access to or notification of a lawyer, the press, or family” (Morales, 2003, n.p.). Imbuing the government with these broad sweeping powers to prosecute and imprison citizens has the potential to undermine grassroots participation. The indirect effect of legislation such as the USA PATRIOT Act creates a rhetorical environment where dissidents refuse to speak out in fear of prosecution or stigmatization.

On the other hand proponents of the PATRIOT act argue that its importance in combating the threat of terrorism. They also claim us that the act has never been abused. In arguing for the USA PATRIOT act Paul Rosenzweig (2004) states, “most of the tales of abuse and misuse are based on mistaken information” (“Ashcroft

legacy”). He and others (Meese & Carafano, 2004) argue that while the potential for abuse exists there has been no substantial abuse of the act’s powers to this point. They also argue there are inherent safeguards in the UAS PATRIOT act that would preclude its misuse: “the power of oversight gives Americans freedom—freedom to grant the government powers, like those found in the PATRIOT act, when the need arises, secure in the knowledge that they can restrain the exercise of those powers appropriately” (Meese, 2004). The point is that Bush’s post 9/11 rhetoric expanded the government’s authority. The debate on the value of the PATRIOT act has yet to be decided, but what is clear is that it is the result of the president’s war rhetoric.

### *Strategic Misrepresentation*

Campbell and Jamieson argue that strategic misrepresentation has two important characteristics: “it stifles dissents and unifies the nation for immediate and sustained action” (1990, p. 119). Bush’s war rhetoric has stifled dissent and discussion at every step of the process. I argue that Bush used strategic misrepresentation in disclosing the facts and constructing the narrative, which pushed us to war with Iraq. Presidents have access to more information than anyone in the Congress or the electorate. Thus they are able to decide which facts are given to the public and which facts are held back. It is not uncommon for presidents to abuse this power. From John Adams starting a war with France to James Polk provoking war with Mexico to acquire their land, presidents have misrepresented facts to drive the country to war for over two hundred years (Campbell & Jamieson, 1990). So it

comes as no surprise that Bush did the same thing in relation to Iraq. The Bush administration misrepresented many facts on the road to war with Iraq but this section will deal with only two: (a) Iraq was linked to Al-Qaeda and (b) Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

Four days after 9/11 President Bush met with his senior policy advisors at Camp David to discuss our response to 9/11. During this meeting, there were “leading hawks aggressively pressing the president to go to war with Iraq, whether or not it was linked to 9/11” (Chaudhry, Scheer, & Scheer, 2003, p. 16). This is important because even though Bush did not mention attacking Iraq in the September 20, 2001 speech, he picked up the cause soon after. By signing the Bush doctrine into law he set the stage for a preemptive strike on Iraq. The only thing left to do was to justify it to the public. Starting with his January 29, 2002 address Bush begins constructing the rhetorical environment that made the attack on Iraq inevitable.

Bush begins the narrative by advancing the role Iraq plays in harboring terrorists and developing weapons of mass destruction which are fully capable of threatening the United States:

The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax, and nerve gas, and nuclear weapons for over a decade. . . States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to



match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic. (Bush, 2002a)

In this speech, Bush begins to link Iraq to terrorism. In fact, Bush is using Iraq as the representation of state sponsored terrorism along with North Korea and Iran. For Bush this lays the groundwork that he will use in the future to rhetorically construct Iraq as a terrorist state.

Between January and September, Bush does not mention Iraq in his major public addresses. Nevertheless, in that time he does make his case for unilateral military preemption in his speech at West Point. Moreover, his administration spends the summer outlining the Iraq threat. Therefore, on September 12, 2002 Bush goes to the United Nations and asks for their approval to invade Iraq. Bush's *Remarks to the U.N.* constructed Iraq as the main threat to international stability. He argues, "Iraq continues to shelter and support terrorist organizations that direct violence against Iran, Israel, and Western governments" (Bush, 2002c). He then changes the perspective of the speech by speaking directly to Saddam and issues five demands: (a) destroy all WMD; (b) stop supporting terrorism; (c) stop persecuting minorities including the Shiite, Sunni, women, and Kurds; (d) account for all Gulf War personnel; and (e) stop breaking the U.N. oil for food embargo. It is from this platform that Bush argues in the October 7, 2002 speech that Iraq and Al Qaeda are partners in their war against America. Bush states "Alliance with terrorists could

allow the Iraqi regime to attack America without leaving any fingerprints” (Bush, 2002d). Bush further argues:

we know that Iraq and the al Qaeda terrorist network share a common enemy -  
- the United States of America. We know that Iraq and al Qaeda have had  
high-level contacts that go back a decade. Some al Qaeda leaders who fled  
Afghanistan went to Iraq. These include one very senior al Qaeda leader who  
received medical treatment in Baghdad this year, and who has been associated  
with planning for chemical and biological attacks. We've learned that Iraq has  
trained al Qaeda members in bomb-making and poisons and deadly gases.  
(Bush, 2002d)

All of these statements construct Iraq as a threat to America through their ties with Al Qaeda. This allows Bush to move to his second argument against Iraq—possession of WMD. The entire 7 October speech, where Bush outlines the Iraq threat to America, is about Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction and their ties to terror. Bush explains, “the Iraqi regime... possesses and produces chemical and biological weapons” and they are “seeking nuclear weapons” (Bush, 2002d). Bush’s rhetorical strategies inflate the importance of Iraq by making them a threat to America and the entire world. His justifications for this conclusion were all built upon strategic misrepresentation. Bush manipulated the intelligence data “based on a political agenda rather than the facts at hand” (Chaudhry, Scheer, & Scheer, 2003, p. 17). By

selecting specific information Bush was able to tell the story he wanted. This has always been the way the office of the president prepares a country for war.

### *Thoughtful Consideration*

Thoughtful consideration was not a large part of Bush's public addresses. In fact, in these speeches it is hard to find where Bush seems reflexive or thoughtful about the consequences of his leadership. Bush repeatedly argues that we are "just" and "righteous" in our action which seems to indicate that our mission need not be debated. Between 2001 and 2003 Bush reinforces his Manichean view of the world as good vs. evil. Never does he say we might be taking the wrong path, nor does he indicate that these are hard decisions. Instead, Bush argues: "Events can turn in one of two ways: If we fail to act in the face of danger, the people of Iraq will continue to live in brutal submission. The regime will have new power to bully and dominate and conquer its neighbors, condemning the Middle East to more years of bloodshed and fear. The regime will remain unstable -- the region will remain unstable, with little hope of freedom, and isolated from the progress of our times. With every step the Iraqi regime takes toward gaining and deploying the most terrible weapons, our own options to confront that regime will narrow" (Bush, 2002c). Bush seems content to believe that there is no need for consideration when it comes to war because there are no other choices. When he argues that our option will narrow he is arguing that unless we fight now we will have to respond to the threat through the doctrine of deterrence by using our own weapons of mass destruction. From the point of view of

the administration and indeed Bush himself, war with Iraq was a forgone conclusion. The only consideration was who was going to help us.

We have seen how the Bush administration chose facts that inflated the case against Iraq. In the process of proving Iraq was a threat they ignored or silenced anyone who disagreed. When the Security Council vetoed an invasion of Iraq Bush warned the U.N. that their role in the world was becoming irrelevant, never wavering, or questioning his decision to disarm Iraq. Bush pushed forward without thoughtful consideration.

### Conclusion

In the days following 9/11 until the next presidential election it was clear that Bush's narrative was controlling the country. This can be seen in his high approval ratings of 58% in January of 2003. In fact, the same poll remarked that Bush got high marks for vision, leadership, and the ability to make hard decisions. Moreover, it stated that "his handling of national defense wins approval from more than six in 10 Americans" (Cnn.com, 2003). With such strong support from the electorate and the Congress Bush was able to capitalize on the passage of the Bush Doctrine and preemptively attack Iraq. The Iraq war was the catalyst for the most spectacular dissent to the Bush narrative by Michael Moore in his documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Chapter Four will examine how *Fahrenheit 9/11* functioned as counternarrative and evaluate its probability, fidelity, and strength.

## Chapter 4: Fahrenheit 9/11: A Case Study of Counternarrative

Immediately following 9/11, President Bush constructed a narrative environment which allowed him to invade Afghanistan and used the narrative to justify invading Iraq. War rhetoric is defined by five functions: unification, narrative explanation of crisis, thoughtful consideration, expansion of presidential powers, and justification of intervention (Jamieson and Campbell, 1990). As illustrated in the previous chapter, Bush's rhetoric enacts this pattern through his public addresses from September 20, 2001 until October 7, 2002. During this time, the Bush administration invaded Afghanistan, shut down dissent, and laid the rhetorical groundwork for the March 2003 invasion of Iraq. Conceptualized as a response to such silencing rhetoric, *Fahrenheit 9/11* develops several arguments to denounce Bush's seemingly tightly crafted narrative. Thus, Chapter Four will contrast this most visible moment of public dissent against the Bush narrative by analyzing the counternarrative of *Fahrenheit 9/11*. I will analyze how counternarratives argue by investigating select strategies that Michael Moore uses to construct his counternarrative and determining their fidelity and probability.

While *Fahrenheit 9/11* makes many arguments there are three that are most responsive to the Bush narrative as outlined in Chapter Three. They are that corruption in the Bush administration undermined our response in the War on Terror, that Bush lied about the Iraq threat, and that every person can make a difference. I will examine each of these themes and select strategies used to construct them argumentatively. Once the strategies are laid out I will evaluate the probability and

fidelity of each theme. In the conclusion, I will evaluate the fidelity and probability of the entire movie.

### Corruption, the War on Terror, and Narrative Inference

*Fahrenheit 9/11* weaves a portrait of Bush as a failure who has succeeded only because he is connected. Moore tells two particular stories to counter Bush's characterization of himself as America's protector. First Moore uses counternarrative to argue that the Bush administration's connections to the Saudis undermined U.S. security. Second Moore argues that Bush's relationship to multinational corporations such as Enron, Unocal, and the Carlyle Group motivated Bush's decision to invade Afghanistan and Iraq. The collision of business interests with those of the everyman is a primary conflict in the movie. First, I briefly overview Moore's counternarrative as it relates to corruption. I explain what narrative inference is and how it functions as a strategy. Lastly, I analyze the probability and fidelity of this counternarrative strategy.

Initially Moore openly accuses the President of attacking Saddam so that the United States did not have to invade Saudi Arabia. To support this claim Moore focuses on the Saudi/Bush connection by asking a series of rhetorical questions:

Let's say one group of people, the American people, pay you \$400,000 a year to be president of the United States and another group of people have invested in you, your friends and their related businesses \$1.4 BILLION over a number of years who you gonna like? Who's your daddy? Because that's how much the Saudi Royals and their associates have given the Bush family, their

friends, and their related business in the past three decades. (Moore, 2004, p. 36)

Moore concludes by asking, “Is it rude to suggest that when the Bush family wakes up in the morning they might be thinking about what’s best for the Saudis instead of what’s best for you and me? Cause \$1.4 billion doesn’t just buy a lot of flights out of the country it buys a lot of love” (Moore, 2004, p. 36). *Fahrenheit 9/11* builds upon this accusation by linking Bush to multinational corporations, in particular Enron, Unocal, and the Carlyle Group. Moore’s argument against President Bush and his handling of the War on Terror is that Bush’s business connections to Saudis--and corporate America--have undermined an effective response to 9/11 and the welfare of the American public. By making this argument, Moore seeks to undermine the official narrative’s probability and fidelity by attacking Bush’s ethics and hence his credibility.

As he constructs his counternarrative against Bush’s narrative Moore zeros in on the president’s business connections as evidence of the administration’s corruption. The most pronounced argument for collusion begins in the segment of the film called “Going to war” where Moore interviews Richard Clarke. Clarke tells us that the Bush administration always wanted to go to war with Iraq and never prepared at all for war with or in Afghanistan. Moore moves from this interview into his role as narrator and asks, “Was the war in Afghanistan really about something else” (Moore, 2004, p. 28)? For the next few minutes, Moore uses his role as narrator to link Bush to the Taliban, Enron, and the oil industry. Moore explains that in 1997,

when Bush was governor of Texas, a Taliban envoy visited Houston to talk to Unocal about building a pipeline through Afghanistan to bring natural gas from central Asia. Moore insinuates that as soon as the war was over the first thing the new government did was sign a deal with neighboring countries agreeing to build a pipeline through Afghanistan. After this deal was signed the first company to enter into a drilling contract in Afghanistan was Halliburton headed by Dick Cheney. While this might seem coincidental Moore asserts that after the U.S. forces ousted the Taliban regime the U.S. government installed Afghanistan's new president Hamid Karzai. Moore (2004) asks, "Who was Hamid Karzai? He was a former advisor to Unocal. Bush also appointed as our envoy to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad, who was also a former Unocal advisor." In the same section, Moore argues that the Carlyle group made a tremendous profit from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan because they own the 11<sup>th</sup> largest defense contractor, United Defense. He leads into this revelation by placing Bush on the board of one of the Carlyle Group's other companies and then infers that his ties with the Carlyle Group have influenced his decision to go to war in Afghanistan and to expand that war into Iraq.

Moore wants the audience to conclude that Bush's administration is corrupt because of its business connections, and this might seem like an acceptable premise as it reveals relevant information about the motivation of President Bush to expand the War on Terror. In addition, Moore provides grounds for this premise by revealing that Carlyle's one-day profits from their public offering of United Defense was 237 million dollars (Moore, 2004, p. 37). *Fahrenheit 9/11* makes a concerted effort to



show that the Bush family has made a great deal of money from their connections to multinational corporations and the Saudi royal family. In doing so Moore infers; he invites viewers to believe that Bush has allowed his business connections to dictate American foreign policy. Even though Moore seems to advance a cogent argument, is it the best explanation for the U.S. going to war in Afghanistan and/or Iraq?

*Moore's use of narrative inference*

Moore uses argument by inference as a main strategy to counter the Bush narrative and implicate the president in corruption. Arguing by inference is an “argument in which a hypothesis is inferred from some data on the grounds that it offers the best available explanation of that data” (Govier, 2005, p. 353). Evaluating argument by inference is critical to our ability to judge the fidelity and probability of many of Moore’s counternarrative arguments. Govier (2005) offers two additional tests, beyond the ARG conditions, to assess an argument by inference. To be accepted as the best explanation of the data an inference must be plausible and falsifiable. More specifically, it must be “consistent with relevant background knowledge” and open “to disconfirmation” (Govier, 2005, p. 353). Argument by inference in *Fahrenheit 9/11* is best examined by recognizing how Moore links Bush to a number of conspiracy theories. Moore suggests that Bush has secret ties with the Saudis, the head of the Fox News division, the vote count lady in Florida, the Taliban, Enron, and the Carlyle Group. Moore attributes Bush’s success in life and politics to his secret ties with corporations, dirty politicians, and extremely powerful money men. Moore’s intention is to illustrate that these connections should make the

American public rethink their adherence to the Bush administration's official story of 9/11 since all of these entities have a vested interest in the decisions made after the bombing of the World Trade Center.

To assess counternarrative fidelity and probability it will be important to assess the arguments made in this section of the movie for cogency. Counternarrative fidelity is composed of the overlapping concepts of rational argument testing and the dialectical tier. Critics can assess the strength of a counternarrative by evaluating the argument using tests of rational argument such as plausibility and falsifiability and by measuring this evaluation against how it is publicly evaluated by others.

*Testing narrative probability and fidelity*

Evaluating a narrative's probability involves evaluating argument cogency. Part of testing probability is evaluating if the argument contains all relevant facts, pro and con, then after careful deliberation, a conclusion is drawn. Ideally, this conclusion will be the most likely explanation for data. Govier (2005) reminds us that testing inference is about testing what is the most likely explanation for any particular causal argument. In every instance, when evaluating inference, the critic needs to ask if this is the best explanation.

One of the most common attacks against Moore's movie was that it was nothing more than conspiracy theory, which undermined the movie's credibility. Attributing Moore's argument to conspiracy effectively diminishes the truth-value of his argument. For example, the treatment of the pipeline argument by popular media outlets has argued that it "twists and bends the available facts and makes glaring

omissions” (Isikoff, 2004, p. 29). Isikoff & Hosenball (2004) also call it a “conspiratorial claim” (p. 1) and Hitchens (2004) calls it a “sinister exercise in moral frivolity” (p. 1). Hitchens argues that there is not a pipeline under construction but a highway that stretches the length of Afghanistan from Kabul to Kandahar. He goes on to say that “if we turn to the facts that are deliberately left out” (Hitchens, 2004, p. 2) we will find a newly formed Afghan army, that Afghanistan is under the protection of the broadest military alliance in history, it has a new constitution and is about to hold a general election. These arguments are counter both to Moore and Richard Clarke’s claim that the U.S. does not have enough troops in Afghanistan and hence the country remains unstable. Even though the situation in Afghanistan has not been easy, what Hitchens observes is important. Moore uses lack of U.S. troop strength in Afghanistan as support for his argument that Bush was not concerned with security. This was not the most likely or best explanation. Instead, it is most likely that fewer troops were needed because NATO was involved with the occupation. NATO’s involvement included troops from over 30 countries so not as many U.S. troops were needed (nato.int, June 28, 2004). Juxtaposing the excluded facts with the ad hominem attack used by the popular media forces *Fahrenheit 9/11* in a corner where Moore’s entire corruption argument becomes questionable as the best explanation for U.S. intentions in Afghanistan. As each sub-argument becomes scrutinized in the dialectical process, the lack of substantive evidence for many of these claims becomes evident. Thus, although Moore’s argument may seem plausible, it is not falsifiable and this creates two problems for Moore. First he fails the basic criterion

for rational argument testing. Second his critics easily exploit the lack of evidence. By not providing falsifiable arguments, Moore leaves his counternarrative open to attacks that he manipulated the available evidence and created propaganda rather than a legitimate argument deserving serious consideration.

Moore argues that Bush and his corporate connections gained from the invasion in Afghanistan and Iraq in two important ways. First, the defense industry made a lot of money. Second, the oil and gas industry stood to make a lot of money as well. From these two premises Moore argues that it only stands to reason that Bush invaded the countries to help his friends. While this may be plausible, Moore is woefully lacking on any falsifiable evidence, to prove these assertions. It is true that the defense industry has made a lot of money since the war on terror began. However, it does not follow that we went to war to increase the profits of the defense industry. What makes it tempting to use this line of thought is that it is tailor made for a movie. In documentaries events are sequenced together to create a narrative and make an argument. Because of the speed of a film, there is no time to reflect on the chain of reasoning and hence visual and auditory sequences often affirm facticity, even when there is none (Hitchens, 2004a; Mander, 1978). Moore takes advantage of this when he makes the argument that money motivated Bush's response to 9/11 and not American security. By showing images of all the companies that stood to profit from 9/11 and then inferring that these companies had control over American foreign policy, Moore provides an explanation for why we invaded Iraq and Afghanistan. Unfortunately this explanation lacks solid reasoning or evidence and hence when

scrutinized lacks narrative probability. Moore's corruption argument may have been acceptable, relevant, and with grounds at first glance but was not able to stand up to close scrutiny. Good arguments need to withstand the critical questioning inherent in the dialectic.

This analysis shows that the strength of a counternarrative depends on two factors: the merits of the argument and public discourse that analyzes these arguments. Therefore, even if the Bush narrative was flawed it gains adherence because of its timeliness, its acceptance by the media over counternarratives, its plausibility, and its falsifiability. Moore's counternarrative, on the other hand, fails because the themes involve fundamental flaws in reasoning; this allows the media to review and discredit his counternarrative.

#### Bush Lied about Iraqi

In Chapter Three I showed that Bush highlights two main arguments in favor of preemptive action: Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and Saddam Hussein had ties to Al Qaeda and 9/11. Each of these arguments amplified the perceived threat Iraq posed to the U.S. and gave justification for intervention. Throughout *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Moore argues that Bush misled the American public about the threat Iraq posed. Moore uses archival footage as a main strategy in countering the administration's narrative. Specifically, he uses this footage to recreate and accentuate the administration's role in creating Iraq as a threat to America and the world. In fact, he uses archive clips of news sources to counter Bush's narrative. In this section, I will

analyze Moore's use of archival footage to argue that Bush misled the American electorate about the threat posed by Iraq.

### *Moore's Use of Archive Footage*

The use of archive footage throughout *Fahrenheit 9/11* is substantial. Of the 40 celebrities who appeared in the film, 37 of them are listed as archival footage (Kopel, 2004). As the writer, director, and narrator of the story Moore is able to choose specific archive footage for maximum effect. Moore uses this footage to tell his version of this story. Archive footage is the lynchpin of Moore's attack on the president and his staff. The seven minutes of infamy, Bush's vacations, Wolfowitz licking his comb, and Ashcroft singing are some of the most damning uses of archive footage in *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Moore uses his role of narrator to buttress the sound bites of Bush, Rumsfeld, Rice, Powell, and Cheney by placing them into a context that is most useful for him and his analysis of the war in Iraq.

In counternarrative documentary, archive footage is used to open space for an alternative view of history that is suppressed by the official narrative. Moore exemplifies this strategy in the way he reconstructs the context of the war in Iraq. He indicts the Bush administration's public justifications for the war in Iraq by showing the main characters contradicting themselves on the threat posed by Iraq. Archive footage shows how the Bush administration linked Iraq to Al Qaeda and weapons of mass destruction and the footage comes from multiple sources including Bush's State of the Union addresses, press conferences and Colin Powell's testimony before the United Nations. Moore uses these sound bites to argue that the majority of

Americans already believed the President because he spent a year convincing them that Saddam was a threat. Moore leads into the discussion of Iraqi links to Al Qaeda by showing a clip of Bush from the January 29, 2002 State of the Union Address where Bush states, "Saddam Hussein aids and protects terrorists, including members of Al Qaeda" (Moore, 2004, p. 79). He shows Bush stating that Saddam has spent enormous sums of money to acquire weapons of mass destruction. Moore then shows Colin Powell before the U.N. making the case to invade Iraq. This is followed by a montage of images with the President, Rumsfeld, Cheney, Powell, and Rice accusing Saddam of pursuing weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) by repeating statements like, "Saddam is determined to get his hands on nuclear bomb[sic]," "We know he's got chemical weapons," and "he's got them" (Moore, 2004, p. 78). After recounting the Bush case Moore then interjects to say, "That's strange because that is not what they said when they took office" (2004, p. 79). He supports this with earlier archive footage of Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice showing them contradicting their own testimonies. Powell argues at a press conference in February 2001 that Hussein "has not developed significant capabilities when it comes to weapons of mass destruction. He is unable to project conventional power against his neighbors" (Moore, 2004, p. 81). Then he shows Rice in July 2001 stating, "We are able to keep arms from him and his military forces have not been rebuilt" (Moore, 2004, p. 81) By contrasting these statements against the official justifications for war in Iraq Moore hopes to persuade the audience that Iraq was not a threat to America. Further, he wants to stress that even if Iraq was a threat it was not for the reasons which were given by the

Bush administration. Evaluating Moore's strategy of using archive footage to undercut official justifications of the Iraq war can be done by testing the probability and fidelity of Moore's arguments using the ARG conditions and the dialectical tier.

*Testing narrative probability and fidelity*

Critics ought to test two things when considering the fidelity and probability of Moore's counternarrative arguments as they apply to the use of archive footage. We need to analyze the cogency of the argument and to compare it to other available evidence or narratives to test its truth. In discussing the form of Moore's use of archive footage, I will also discuss its twofold function: to indict the credibility of Bush and his staff and to indict the credibility of the justifications for war.

First Moore uses the archive footage to indict the credibility of Bush and his staff. From the very beginning of the movie, Moore uses this footage to attack the character of Bush and his staff. Two attacks exemplify this strategy: Wolfowitz licking his comb and Ashcroft singing 'Let the Eagle Soar.' On face these two scenes function as ad hominem attacks; however, there is more to them than just attacking the people. These scenes seek to attack the Bush Administration's credibility as judicious architects of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Visually these scenes argue that the people in the administration are distasteful and zealous. Watching Wolfowitz groom himself by licking his comb is distasteful because most people would disapprove of this type of grooming. Even though it is disgusting, it does not prove that Wolfowitz is unqualified or bad at his job. The same is true for Moore's depiction of Ashcroft singing 'Let the Eagle Soar.' While it does prove that Ashcroft



is overzealous, and a little strange, the question that needs to be asked is does it prove that Ashcroft is mentally unfit to do his job as attorney general? I do not think that it does. Ashcroft can be both overzealous in his patriotism for America but still be immensely qualified to be attorney general. Moore continues his attack on the administration by specifically attacking Bush with the use of archive footage. Moore shows Bush making faces before a State of the Union address, being flippant about the War on Terror while on the golf course, and sitting in the Florida classroom for nearly seven minutes after Andrew Card told Bush that the United States was under attack.

The real questions surrounding these depictions are these: are they acceptable, relevant, and do they provide grounds for Moore's argument. At first glance, these depictions of the Bush administration are acceptable because these depictions are so different from how we normally see the members of the administration. We get the impression that this is how these people really are when no one is watching. In this way, these depictions contain a level of perceived authenticity that other more professional depictions of them lack. This strategy spills over into Moore's depictions of Bush overwhelmed by the gravity of 9/11. He shows Bush unable to commit to a decisive course of action in its immediate aftermath. Likewise, his depictions of Ashcroft and Wolfowitz show them being overzealous and distasteful. However, when used as grounds to support the overarching argument that these men are unfit to lead these arguments are not relevant to that conclusion. Being distasteful or overzealous does not make him or her incompetent to be attorney general or deputy

secretary of defense and most importantly, it does not make them liars. Instead of providing factual evidence for his conclusion, Moore wants viewers to infer that because they are distasteful and overzealous that they are liars. However, this strategy lacks real evidence to prove that there is an intention or motivation to lie about the war in Iraq. Moore's reliance on archive footage as grounds to prove these arguments hurts the strength of his counternarrative because these are not relevant to his premise.

These depictions also fail the dialectical tier because upon further scrutiny they lack acceptability for a general audience because of their tone. These types of attacks open Moore up to indictments of being mean. One critic called Moore's handling of the issues as "hyperbolic hysteria" (Flowers, 2004, p. 1). Another added it was "mean spirited mockery" (Overstreet, 2004, p. 1). These indictments of Moore's uses of archive footage help chip away at the credibility of the message Moore wants his audiences to accept. Pontillo (2004) argues, "The biased attack film *Fahrenheit 9/11* did more to energize apathetic voters than anything Karl Rove could have ever dreamed up. Most Americans do not care for hateful innuendo assaults on our commander in chief" (p. A 26). In short, Moore's use of archive footage to attack the President and his staff undermined the fidelity of his argument because some viewers disliked the tone of the movie thus closing off his message to an entire portion of his targeted audience, the undecided voter. While the above attacks are directed at Moore, they function to undermine the credibility of his message in the same way that Moore intended to undermine the credibility of the administration.

These attacks trade off with substantive discussion of the issues that the movie seeks to raise. In this respect, *Fahrenheit 9/11* does raise public discussion but not about the Iraq war; instead, it raises questions about Michael Moore and his movie.

The drawbacks to Moore's use of archive footage in *Fahrenheit 9/11* outweigh its benefits. In *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Moore's use of archive footage overshadows the effective ways that he uses it to inform and argue. Many of Moore's mainstream critics focus on his use of archive footage to attack the president and find it distasteful and unnecessary. Their condemnation of this strategy limits his audience. You can only persuade the people who will see the movie. The litany of attacks on Moore wore down his movie's credibility until "a majority of respondents (56 percent) said they had neither seen the film nor intended to see it" (Panagopoulos, 2004, p. 15). The limited audience allowed a limited effect.

The critics of *Fahrenheit 9/11* argue that it reinforces an environment of partisanship by not showing equal sides to the debate about the Iraq war. Christopher Hitchens (2004a) admits "that a documentary must have a "POV" or point of view and that it must also impose a narrative line" (p. 1). However, he accuses Moore of leaving out anything that contradicts his narrative and claims that if the director uses non-falsifiable evidence then he may "*have betrayed your craft*" (Hitchens, 2004a, p. 1). Hitchens (2004a) adds that that playing to the audience by showing these images of the administration and not relying on fact is "patronizing them and insulting them" (p. 1). To end his line of attack Hitchens (2004a) concludes that anyone "who violates this pact with readers or viewers are [sic] to be despised" (p. 1). Hitchens'

attacks are based on the fact that “at no point does Michael Moore make the smallest effort to be objective. At no moment does he pass up the chance of a cheap sneer or a jeer. He pitilessly focuses his camera, for minutes after he should have turned it off, on a distraught and bereaved mother whose grief we have already shared....Such courage” (Hitchens, 2004a, p. 1). Attacks such as these prompted critics to label the movie as propaganda because it had a clear ideological slant. This criticism is buttressed by Moore’s unfair depiction of President Bush throughout the film (Hitchens, 2004a; Hitchens, 2004b; Isikoff, 2004; Overstreet, 2004; Toppman, 2004). These accusations of partisanship created an ideological rift between Moore and the audience he needed and wanted to reach. Recognizing that Moore limits his audience by using archive footage to attack the president helps explain why the Bush administration’s official narrative remains entrenched. Moore limited the persuasive appeal of his movie in this way and it fails as an effective counternarrative because it traded off with substantive discussion about the Iraq war.

### Everyone Can Make a Difference

Bush argues throughout his narrative that each American needs to sacrifice for the greater good. Even though this appeal is ambiguous it can be narrowed to when he asks citizens to support the troops. This support never requires a personal sacrifice. Instead, Bush’s argument amounts to the push for a unified citizenry where Bush situates Americans as part of something larger than themselves. He argues that “America is embracing a new ethic and a new creed: ‘Let’s roll.’ The let’s roll creed calls for Americans to support a unified America which promotes the demands of

human dignity; the rule of law; limits on the power of the state; respect for women; private property; free speech; equal justice; and religious tolerance” (Bush, 2002a, ¶ 58). It is Bush’s strategy to construct a unified conscience of the American body politic, which trusts the president and supports his decisions without question. Bush jokes about the democratic process, “If this were a dictatorship, it’d be a heck of a lot easier, just so long as I’m the dictator” (Bush, 2000, n.p.). Moore uses this statement as a nexus point for his fight against Bush’s politics.

The plot of *Fahrenheit 9/11* revolves around the man vs. society (in particular capitalist business interests) conflict theme. It is in this milieu that Moore situates his conflict with Bush. Moore pits himself as the everyman against the corporate greed of American politics. In his quest to overthrow the evil dictator (Bush) our protagonist also finds likeminded individuals, such as Jim McDermott, Craig Unger, and Abdul Henderson, along the way. No one is more important, however, than Lila Lipscomb and her family. Moore uses Lila Lipscomb to shock his audience back to the reality of the impact of war. Allowing Lila Lipscomb to tell her story is essential to Moore’s counternarrative. Her story, within the larger narrative, gives power to the powerless and it frames Moore’s overarching argument, which is that the most important people are those who never get to speak. As such each of their stories speaks truth to power and can change our cultural, social, and political existence. To achieve this change Moore uses appeals to pathos.

*Appealing to pathos*

Perhaps Moore's most effective strategy throughout *Fahrenheit 9/11* is his use of emotional appeals to persuade. The reviews almost unanimously recognized Moore's emotional appeals as the persuasive force of the movie. Wilmington (2004) of the *Chicago Tribune* writes, "'Fahrenheit' may provoke, delight or divide its audience. But no one will react indifferently to this shocking, sad, and funny look at the Bush administration's handling of terrorism and the Iraqi war." He continues, "At times it wrenches your heart. That's the strength of 'Fahrenheit 9/11': the way it attacks emotions and stings us to laughter, anger, and sorrow." Specifically, Moore's use of Lila Lipscomb shocks and saddens the audience. Strauss (2004), a reviewer for *USA Today*, argues that the scenes with Lila Lipscomb are "gut wrenching and haunting" (n.p.).

Fisher & Filloy (1987) explain how appeals to emotion function: "through a revelation of characters representing different value orientations in conflicts with themselves, others, or their environment, the auditor is induced to a felt belief, a sense of the message advanced by the work" (p. 161). This is how literature argues and how Moore uses emotional argument throughout his film. They hold that emotional arguments create a belief based on the strength of the emotion that it creates. Fisher & Filloy (1987) continue that the belief "is one based on an immediate, emotional, intuitive, response to representation...it is a thought not based on deliberate thought or reasoned analysis" (p. 161). Fisher & Filloy are not arguing that appeals to pathos are not reasonable. Instead, they are arguing that an emotional argument is not a traditional reasoned argumentative claim. Moore wants to elicit an emotional

response and does this by drawing someone from the margins to tell her story. In *Fahrenheit 9/11*, that person is Lila Lipscomb.

Lila lost her son in Iraq. She comes from a family of military people—her father, her uncles, and her daughter. She considers herself a patriot and the armed forces a good career choice, and she is raising her family as the all-American family. In many ways, Lila Lipscomb is every mother. She is an archetype being (re)constructed right before the audiences' eyes. Žizek (2001) in *Fright of Real Tears* explains the conundrum of the documentary filmmaker when it comes to displaying emotions. The filmmaker must at the same time be frightened by the emotions of his subjects but want to catch their real grief and anguish on camera. This conundrum is precisely the position the audience is placed in with Lila as we watch her grieve onscreen and blame herself and her country for the loss of her son. Her tears are real. Even Moore's critics recognize the power of his appeals to emotion (Overstreet, 2004; Kopel, 2004; Hitchens, 2004a). Some even argued that he went for these emotional appeals instead of reasoned argument (e.g. Overstreet, 2004). However, Moore's fans argue that his emotional appeals are key to overcoming the strength of Bush's narrative. Hamill (2004) describes his and the audiences' reaction: "I was as emotionally moved by the applause as I was by the film, because that was the powerful sound of Joe Public" (p. 240). These emotions are where Moore hoped to lead the audience. Part of his strategy was to infuriate, cajole, and direct the audience to action.

*Testing narrative fidelity and probability*

While emotion as argument lacks a formal structure it can be analyzed and evaluated using the tests for arguments from example and formal propriety. The tests for example involve the ARG conditions with the addition of determining if the example is typical (representative). Is Lila Lipscomb a representative example? While she is only one woman, her story of the grieving mother is an old one. It traverses time and wars. She is used—correctly—as a representative example. As an argument, Lila’s story relates to the audience and is acceptable because it coalesces with what the audience already believes about a mother’s response to the loss of a child. She gives reasons in both verbal and visual ways. However, the power of her argument is not in its form, but its function. She touches people and allows them to suspend their disbelief and adjust the weight of their reasoning so that the logical contradictions and leaps of faith are easy to make with the story when we find ourselves emotionally involved (Goodnight, 2005). It seems reasonable to argue that a mother’s loss of her child is an emotion with which American audiences can identify. Even if viewers have never lost a child, it is likely they have lost someone close to them and as such understand the feeling of loss. By elevating Lila Lipscomb as the synecdoche of all mothers who have lost a child in the Iraq war, Moore creates an argument that builds on the shared assumption that losing a child is a terrible emotional and physical loss. The attempt to link this shared assumption to an emotional appeal and then to action is where Moore’s argument begins to unravel.

To understand and evaluate emotional appeals is not easy, but formal propriety can help. When “rhetoric appeals to the emotions, it is by proving the truth



of an emotional judgment or by using the connection between emotional judgment and emotional desire to prove the desirability of an action” (Register, 1999, p. 1).

Manolescu (2004), drawing on Kenneth Burke, explains that emotional appeals can be evaluated by analyzing formal propriety. In other words, does the rhetor create and fulfill expectations by using an emotional appeal? These expectations are based on norms or assumptions which can be gleaned from the social and cultural context of the rhetor and audience. The “formal appeal involves aligning assumptions which, in turn, ‘contributes to the formation of attitudes, and thus to the determining of conduct’” (Manolescu, 2004, p. 116). The film fulfills our expectation of what that pain must be when Lila recounts the phone call from the Secretary of Defense informing her that her son, Michael Pedersen, has been killed. She states “the grief grabbed me so hard that I literally fell on the floor...and I remember screaming ‘Why did they have to take my son?’” (Moore, 2004, p. 115). Taking it further Lila reads a letter from her son, which excoriates Bush and his handling of the war on terror. While we watch her read this letter she breaks down multiple times. In fact, the stage directions note “Lila is overcome with emotion” (Moore, 2004, p. 118). The recognition of Lila as representative of mothers who have lost a child to war is where Moore generates the most powerful emotional appeal in the movie. Allowing Lila to tell her story adds force to Moore’s counternarrative against the Bush administration. She shows that telling your story can make a difference and that each of us should not be afraid to come forward. As synecdoche, Lila shows that good people should disagree with a bad war. Unfortunately, Moore’s use of Lila Lipscomb does a good

job of generating discussion about the movie but fails to spillover into discussion about the merits of the Iraq war. Even though audiences empathize with Lila her narrative is polysemic. On the one hand, it can be read as an antiwar counternarrative. On the other hand, it can be read as evidence of Bush's call to support the troops with thought and appropriate emotional response rather than action and genuine sacrifice. Because of its polysemic nature, Lila's counternarrative lacks the power to generate the public debate that Moore had hoped. In this respect Moore's use of Lila Lipscomb is a failure of form because it like his use of archive footage does not generate a broader public discussion of the war.

### Conclusion

Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* was a groundbreaking movie in many respects. It was the first documentary to open number one at the box office and, to date, it is the largest grossing documentary of all time. These accomplishments should not be overlooked because they make this movie significant. However, even though it succeeds in many ways it failed in others. Moore had hoped that his movie would compel the American electorate to vote Bush out of office and to support withdrawal from Iraq. Neither of these goals was accomplished.

### *Fahrenheit 9/11 as a Failure of Form and Function*

It has been purpose of this thesis to analyze the process of the failure. I began by asking the question why Moore's movie failed to generate enough momentum to achieve its goals. I came up with one overarching answer: it lacked fidelity. By

analyzing the form and function of *Fahrenheit 9/11* as counternarrative I argue that Moore's movie was unable to withstand the critical questioning of the dialectical tier because some of the arguments which Moore relied heavily on lacked cogency. This problem was compounded by the fact that the arguments which had cogency failed to spillover and generate public discussion about the inadequacies of Bush's official narrative.

*Fahrenheit 9/11* failed to generate public deliberation. The first hour of Moore's movie was set up to destroy the image of George W. Bush and his administration. Moore wanted to undermine "Bush's image of dignity and credibility" (Toplin, 2006, p. 91). To achieve this end Moore's strategies relied on argument by inference and ad hominem attacks. However, these attacks lacked the cogency and relevance that were critical for them to be effective. The evidence necessary for Moore to draw linkages that would implicate Bush in corruption scandals was not there. Even when he tried to provide reasoning to fill in the gaps of his evidence these reasons were unable to withstand the critical questioning of the dialectic. In this regard Moore's arguments lacked grounds and that destroyed their cogency.

Moore's counternarrative also failed because his strategies invited criticism of his credibility instead of creating public debate about the war. Moore uses his position as narrator and creator to create inferential cues for the audience. These inferential cues allow Moore to lead the audience to his desired conclusion and hence allow the movie to achieve a sense of coherence. Moore has to exclude many

arguments which would contradict his due to time and an interest of narrative integrity. When these arguments are exposed it looks as if Moore is lying or did poor research. Either way it weakens his credibility and becomes a staging platform for the personal attacks against Moore. Many of the attacks that have been leveled at *Fahrenheit 9/11* have been leveled at the director. Both Isikoff (2004) and Hitchens (2004a & b) attack Moore personally. Critics have attacked Moore for his lack of finesse and nuance when attacking Bush (Isikoff, 2004; Toppman 2004). Others have even argued that “the writer-director injects himself into the proceedings . . . and his grandstanding plays smell of juvenile egotism” (Toppman, 2004, n.p.). These attacks serve to taint Moore’s message because they undermine his credibility as a source of fact. Diminishing a rhetor’s ethos is one way to attack the message, especially if the message is non-falsifiable like much of Moore’s argument. When an argument is evidenced and has a factual basis, attacking the arguer has little effect on the truth-value of the argument. However, when the argument is based entirely on the credibility of the speaker then attacking credibility is a way to attack the argument.

Lila Lipscomb’s narrative lacked relevance. It is interesting to think of Lila’s narrative as both important and irrelevant at the same time. Moore’s strategy is to use Lila as an emotional lever to generate public discussion and adherence from his audience, and for some it accomplished this goal. However, the polysemic nature of her narrative allowed her narrative to spin against Moore’s goals. Simply put, the audience was able to sympathize with Lila and still only support the troops rather than genuinely sacrifice. In fact, the sympathy that the audience felt for Lila and her story

gives a reason to support the official narrative and the Bush administration. Her narrative can be read as: while there are many grieving mothers around the country the only way we can help them is to support our troops with whatever they need to win the war and bring them home. Herein lays the problem Moore shows no incompatibility between the sympathy that the audience felt and the Bush narrative. In other words, we understand that her losing her son is terrible but how does this prove that Iraq is not a threat to America? It does not. Her narrative does not speak to the terror threat or many of the other justifications that the administration gave for intervention in Iraq. At best, her narrative is an anti-war sentiment. It shows a mother against war but it could be any war. There is nothing in particular about her narrative, which indicts this particular war. In this way, it lacks relevance to the justifications for *this* war. It hurts to watch Lila but we can empathize and still support the war and the troops: it plays into the Bush narrative by calling for us to support the troops but never sacrifice personally.

*Fahrenheit 9/11 opens space for marginalized voices*

However, Moore was extremely successful in two regards. His movie was a vehicle allowing the marginalized to speak, like Corporal Abdul Henderson and Lila Lipscomb. Without the platform of *Fahrenheit 9/11* it is unlikely that Lila Lipscomb or Corporal Henderson's stories would have ever been heard. At the time the movie came out there were few public forums, aside from internet sites, which brought dissenters into the open to tell their stories.

It has been the purpose of this chapter to show how Moore's movie fit the category of a counternarrative and to explain how it worked. In Chapter Five, I will conclude this study by evaluating the heuristic value of the theory of counternarrative. I will also show the direction for future research and reflect upon the artifact and its impact since the election of 2004.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion and Implications

It is my purpose to study the form and function of counternarrative by applying a theory of counternarrative to a text. Specifically this essay asks, why did Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, fail as a counternarrative? In an attempt to answer this question, I proceeded in three steps. I developed a theory of counternarrative, established the official narrative, and analyzed the counternarrative through the application of rational argument testing and the dialectical tier.

Chapter 2 developed a theory of counternarrative by analyzing narrative theory and adding rational argument testing. Fisher (1987) argues that narrative does not function by using rational forms of argument but uses abstract concepts such as fidelity and probability to determine its power. It has been my argument that fidelity and probability explain how a single rhetorical act functions but does little to explain how one narrative displaces another, or how to evaluate competing narratives. Scholars (Rowland 1987; Warnick, 1987) have argued that narrative needs argument but have yet to develop a systemic approach. This essay begins the process of creating a narrative framework that evaluates competing narratives. For this reason counternarrative is important.

Counternarrative bridges these gaps in narrative theory. Counternarrative form has three basic parts: it must be a narrative, it must directly argue against another narrative, and it must open space for marginalized voices. Moreover, the counternarrative must invigorate public debate and discussion. This provides a

starting point for the discussion of how counternarratives differ from traditional narratives. The strength of this study comes from creating a framework that explains the process of narrative argumentation and how marginalized narratives attempt to displace official narratives.

To explain this process two steps are critical: ascertaining the official narrative and contrasting it to the counternarrative. This begins the process of dialectical interrogation which is the crux of this essay. In Chapter 3, I expose how the Bush narrative followed a model of war rhetoric by analyzing Bush's five main presidential speeches from September 2001 through October 2002. These speeches construct a narrative environment that laid the groundwork for the invasions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Bush used rhetoric to define the meaning of 9/11 in narrative terms. He defined the U.S. fight against terrorism and Al Qaeda as the eternal struggle of good against evil, where all citizens are forced to choose a side, them or us. By rhetorically defining the tragedy and hence the nation's actions in a Manichean fashion Bush effectively disabled thoughtful deliberation and discouraged dissent against the official post-9/11 narrative. This rhetorical environment created the impetus for Moore to produce *Fahrenheit 9/11*

*Fahrenheit 9/11* is a counternarrative responding to Bush's official description of 9/11. Chapter 4 analyzes the strategies and arguments that Moore formulates in an attempt to transform the narrative meaning of 9/11. Moore used argument by



inference, archival footage, and argument through pathos to counter some of Bush's major claims.

Moore uses argument by inference to implicate Bush in corruption.

Following 9/11, Bush established himself as the trusted leader of America. Moore counters this by arguing that Bush had links to multiple multinational corporations, which were profiting from the wars. For Moore this was proof that this war was only about money. Moore also uses archive footage to argue that Bush lied about his motives in attacking Iraq. This was further proof for Moore that multinational business interests had corrupted the administration. The problem with these arguments is that Moore never provides any evidence to substantiate these claims. This created real problems for the fidelity of Moore's counternarrative because many of Moore's critics focused on these specious arguments. This argument also functioned to imply that since the reasons for the war were lies then Americans should no longer support the war based on lies. Unfortunately, these arguments failed to generate public debate or discussion about the war in Iraq. Instead, they created massive debates about Moore, his ethics, and the truthiness of the movie but traded-off with discussions about the war in Iraq. Moore's final strategy is to argue through the use of emotion. This is Moore's most compelling argument in the film. However, its polysemic nature allows it to be read as a reason to support the Bush narrative and the troops. While everyone identifies with the pain that Lila has for losing her son, this does not lead everyone to the same conclusion. For some it might mean we should withdraw from Iraq. For others it might mean that we should fully

support our troops so that we can end this war and ensure no more Lila's. In this way, the persuasive impact of Lila only has fidelity for those who reach the same conclusion as Moore. This type of strategy limits the members of the audience who can adhere to the narrative. It was my intention in these chapters to show how a narrative rises to the official level and how a counternarrative goes about responding to it. By examining this process I also recognized the implications and the need for further research of my theory and its application.

### Implications

This study has two important implications for the study of rhetorical criticism, narrative criticism, and argument theory: explanatory and practical. Counternarrative provides a framework to evaluate competing narratives. Using the dialectic and applying it to competing narratives clarifies the strengths and weaknesses of an official narrative. This use of rational argument testing within the dialectical tier can expose the contradictions and fallacies that are inherent in the official narrative. However, if the official narrative's arguments are stronger, then it can be predicted that the counternarrative will fail. In addition, this is what happened to *Fahrenheit 9/11*. The arguments contained in *Fahrenheit* were not as acceptable, on a national scale, as those of the Bush administration. Hence, *Fahrenheit* failed to dislodge Bush's story. Moore relies too heavily on inference, poor research, and ad hominem attack as strategies to displace the official Bush narrative. In our media driven society Moore's movie needed to stand up to massive criticism from both the

mainstream press and ideological right. However, the gaps in his argument became focal points that helped undermine both the fidelity and probability of Moore's narrative. Within this dialectic a counternarrative can succeed when it is the best explanation for an event and can stand up to critical questioning.

The other important advantage for this theory and its application is that it is generalizable and parsimonious. This theory, like narrative, can be applied to a variety of texts. These texts can range from written, spoken, to visual texts or a text that combines all three, like *Fahrenheit 9/11*. The ability to use this theory to explain an array of texts is due to its simplicity. For a theory to be usable, it should be simple. An advantage to this theory of counternarrative is that its application is not complicated. Finding the premises and analyzing their acceptability, relevance, and grounds is a simple process as is using the dialectical tier. In the dialectical tier the critic amasses the available evidence and reads it to find how it differs or agrees with the counternarrative. She then shows how this evidence affects probability or fidelity. Overall, this process may be time-consuming but is not hard. Counternarrative theory also expands the explanatory framework to create a deeper understanding of how narratives and counternarratives work and how they gain adherence from their audiences.

#### Suggestions for Further Research

This thesis is only the beginning of the study of counternarratives; it certainly is not the final word on counternarrative theory. As such, there are ways in which to

extend the research of counternarrative theory and in particular *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Counternarrative theory might be expanded to include other tools from narrative criticism which illuminate how film narratives work. In particular understanding films starting points and its scene construction will inform future critics about the arguments the films creators are trying to make. By using *in media res* and *mis-en-scene* a rhetorical critic can unpack the visual elements of the film's narrative.

*In media res* literally means “in the middle of things” (Pierce, 2003, p. 194) and since all stories must begin somewhere where they begin is often significant. Moore begins *Fahrenheit 9/11* at an Al Gore rally celebrating his win of Florida and the 2000 election, only to stop it in the middle and run the same scene in reverse. This begins the narrative visually and rhetorically. Showing the scene in reverse is a powerful reminder that the major news networks had to rescind their prediction in favor of Gore winning Florida. For Moore this is the middle of the Bush narrative and he shows this by jumping into Bush's past early in the movie. However, it functions as the beginning of the movie. The decision by the director of starting points “is critical to both initial impressions and believable extensions in story creation” (Pierce, 2003, p. 195). In other words, *in media res* is an important element in understanding how a visual narrative creates narrative fidelity. This is also true for *mis-en-scene* which also contributes to the narrative's fidelity and probability.

*Mis-en-scene* is a French term which means “placed in a scene” (Pierce, 2003, p. 192). What goes into a scene and what that means is a part of narrative criticism

which was overlooked by this thesis, because of its focus on argument. Yet, scene construction-which includes lighting, actor placement, scenery, props, streetscapes and so forth- is an important element in deciphering the meaning of a film and its parts. For Moore this is especially important in *Fahrenheit* because most of the film is archive footage and voice over. The scenes which are actually filmed help shape the narrative's probability and fidelity by their use of certain objects. This is very evident in the scene where Moore rents an ice cream truck and drives around Capitol Hill reading them Patriot Act over a loud speaker. The decision to construct this whole scene can be read from multiple perspectives but each reading will influence how the critic assesses the probability and fidelity of the movie. These two elements can be used by narrative critics to expand their discussion of narrative in a way that this thesis does not cover. In this thesis I was more concerned with how arguments are constructed through narrative and against narrative. It has been my contention that counternarrative must begin with the unpacking of arguments.

Counternarrative theory should be an evolving concept. The theory of counternarrative presented here is simple. Because of this, it runs the risk of being overly simple. The world is complex and simple explanations can miss the mark and leave out important variables, which can change a critic's analysis. Explanations for the world do not always fall into easy categories such as form and function or the binaries of center and margins. Often these concepts are unstable, shifting, overlapping, reinforcing, and subverting themselves and each other all at the same time. Oversimplifying how or why a counternarrative works can undermine our

scholarship on dissent, discussion, and public debate and create a Manichean worldview we are seeking to avoid with our rigorous analysis of an artifact. In studying *Fahrenheit 9/11* or other potentially partisan attempts at persuasion, the critic must be aware of the dangers of reifying these binary structures and seek to explain the discourse so that it evaluates and illuminates aspects of the discourse that add to the debate by adding another voice to the discussion. Further analysis of *Fahrenheit 9/11* should be done using other methods. There are many ways to engage this text for the critic and we should try to engage it from multiple rhetorical perspectives. Narrative and counternarrative is but one way to look at this text. Post-modern theories of media criticism, cultural criticism, deconstruction, Burke, Marxist, and psychoanalytic theories can all give a different perspective on Moore's strategies and their outcomes, and each is important to adding a differing voice on the current political situation and how it affects audiences.

Future studies can also enter into the larger discussion of the role of the media as a conduit for official narratives and counternarratives. Simply put, it is important to examine the role the mainstream media plays in perpetuating or challenging an official narrative. When the media challenges narratives it creates instability for an official narrative and allows vigorous public debate to occur. Absent media criticism, an official narrative can take on factual quality. This is similar to what happened to the Bush narrative. Moore recognizes this and attempts to expose the media's complicity in Bush's war rhetoric, which was directly responsible for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. He argues it was their responsibility to question Bush's

motives and information. Instead, what he shows is media refusing to debate, dissent, or question Bush. It seems Moore believes that the media should function as a fourth branch of the government providing checks and balances to maintain the balance of power. After 9/11 that did not happen. The media's lack of questions only strengthened the fidelity of Bush's narrative and hence made Moore's job even tougher. This might explain why Moore's counternarrative had so much trouble gaining traction and circulating outside of an already disenfranchised portion of the electorate.

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